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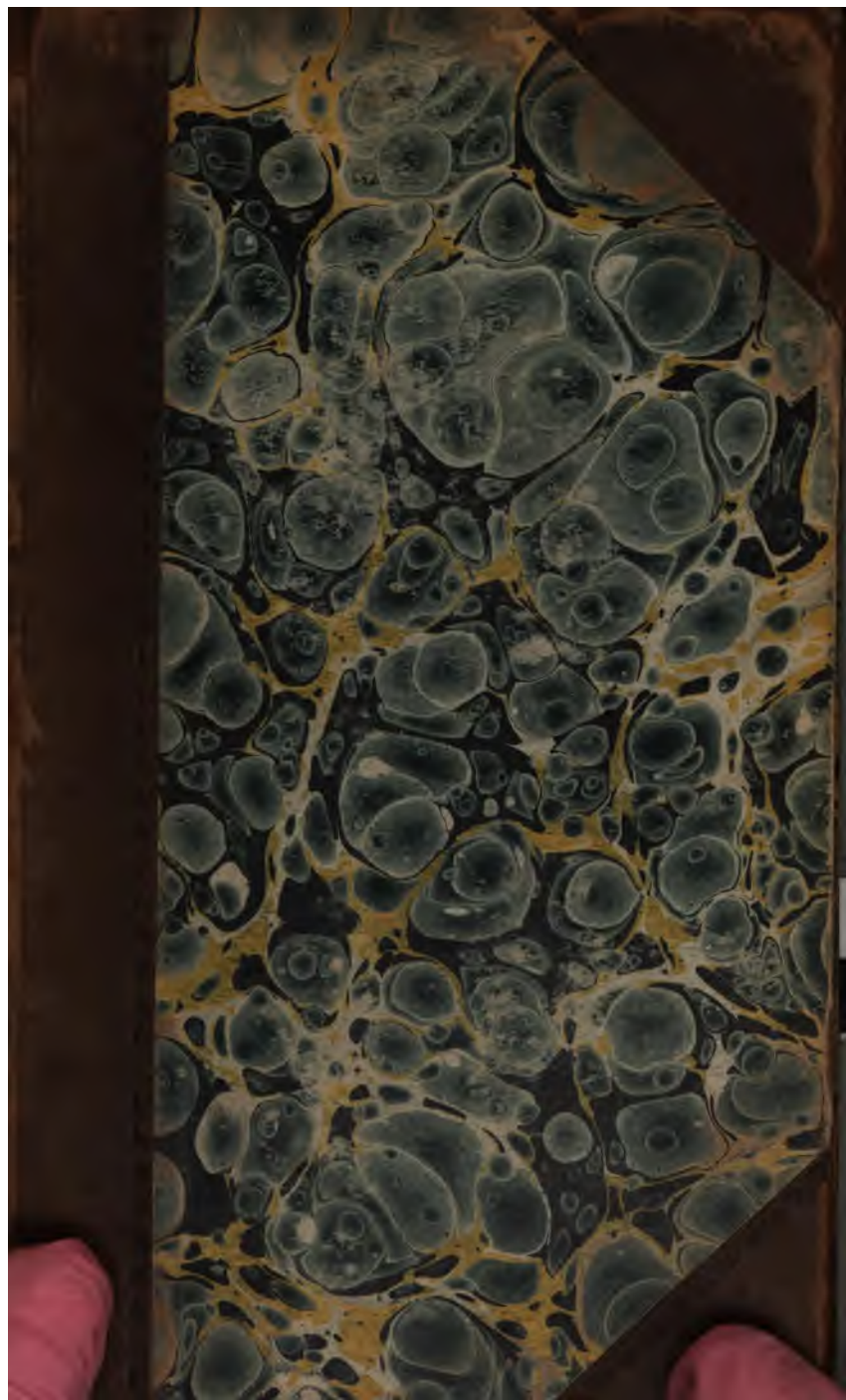
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FOURTEEN SERMONS

ON THE

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER,

AND

ON OTHER SUBJECTS;

PREACHED

IN A PARISH CHURCH IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND,

IN THE YEARS 1833 AND 1834.

BY

A LATE FELLOW OF A COLLEGE IN OXFORD.

OXFORD,

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1834.

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SOME additions and many improvements would in all probability have been made in this volume, if the author of it had not been removed into a distant part of the country, before he was able to finish the course of sermons, of which they were intended to form a part. He is aware, that in whatever degree the public may consider them worthy of attention in their present state, they would have had a better claim to it, if he had waited until he might have found time to revise them more carefully; but as the immediate occasion for which they were printed required that their publication should take place with as little delay as possible, he has ventured to let them see the light almost as they were preached, in the hope that, by the Divine blessing, they may be productive of good to those that heard them, and to others into whose hands they may happen to fall.

July 16, 1834.

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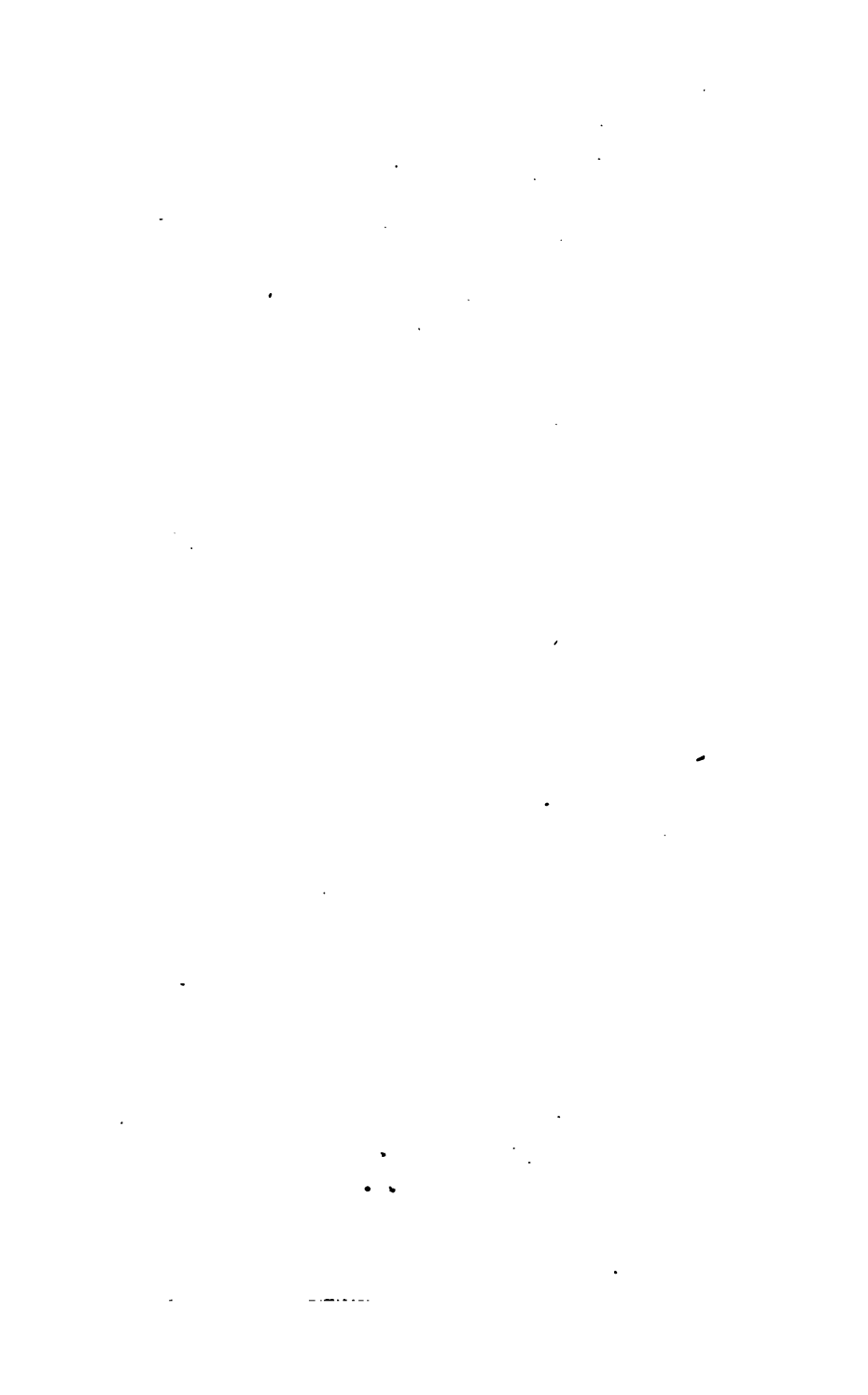
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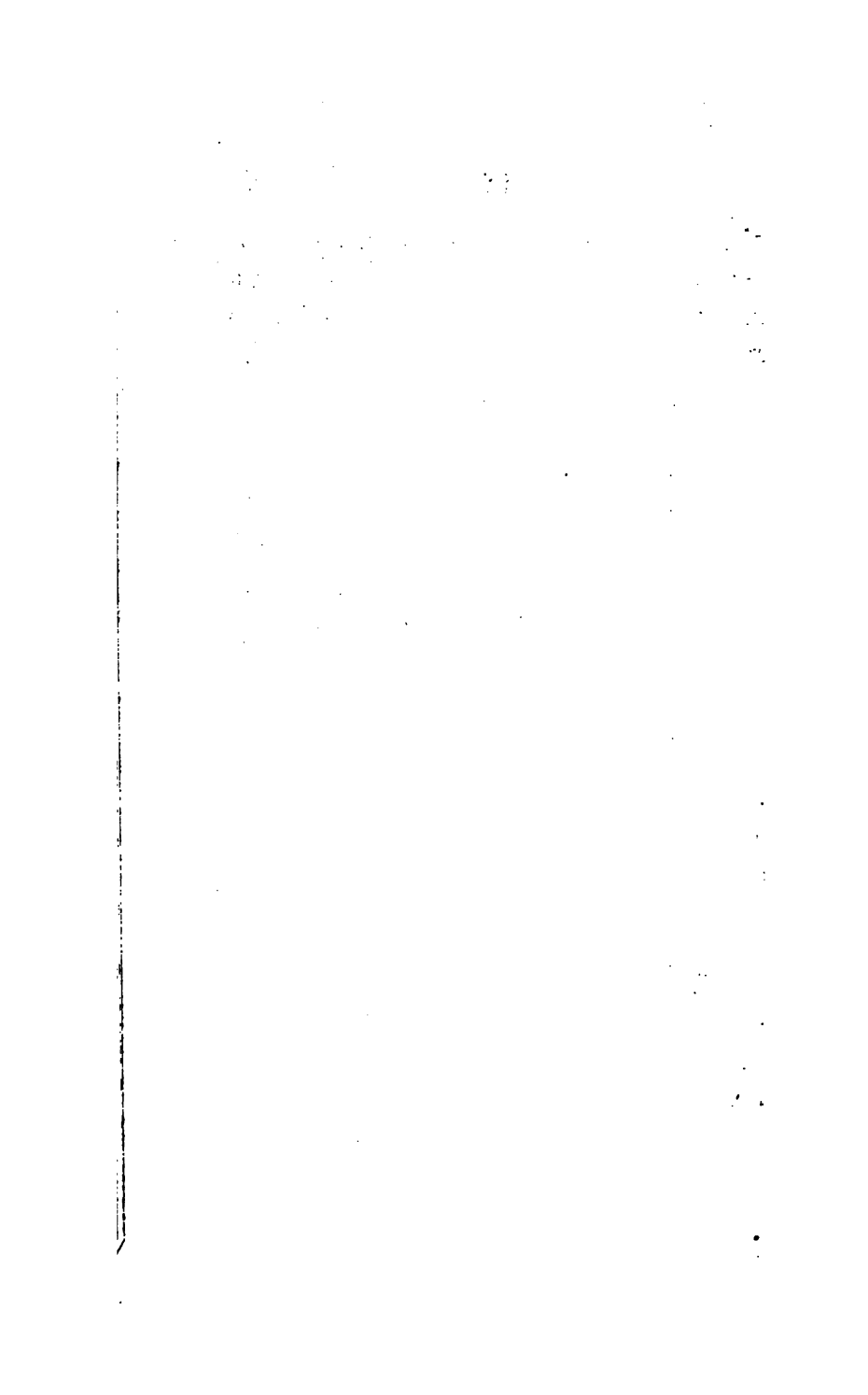
SERMON I.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

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THE solemn season of Lent, when the Church calls upon all her members to consider their ways, and with hearty repentance and true faith to turn unto God, through Jesus Christ, is terminated by the affecting

commemoration of our blessed Lord's death and sacrifice. From the first day of Lent, (when the service appointed for the day is of such a nature, as that no one can read and reflect on without being struck with the folly and misery of delaying his repentance,) and throughout all the season, the language of the Church is full of contrition and sorrow for sin, of deprecation of God's wrath, of holy purposes of amendment, and of supplications for new supplies of grace; and the whole is concluded with that awful service, wherein Christians are supplied with every comfortable assurance, that the Lord, to whom they turn weeping, fasting, and praying, will be favourable to them; that He, who was wounded for our iniquities, and died to be a sacrifice for our sins, will be merciful unto us, and forgive us; that He, who, by the eternal Spirit, offered up Himself without spot to God, will purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God. That all this comfort is to be derived from the concluding service of which

I am speaking, and, I may add, that every consideration, which can give strength to devotional practice, and increase the charities of life, is connected with the due celebration of that service, will, I trust, be sufficiently set before you, (between the present time and Easter,) to lead to those devout dispositions, with which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper should be attended. May God enable me so to speak upon the present occasion, and upon all others connected especially with this subject, and may he dispose all our hearts so to hear and understand, that the forty days of Lent may find us continually increasing in all those fruits of the Spirit, which become the disciples of a crucified Saviour.

Of the importance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as a Christian ordinance, to be observed by all the disciples of Jesus Christ, we can scarcely conceive sufficiently exalted thoughts, when we find it made a matter of special revelation to St. Paul. That Apostle declares to us by the Spirit,

that, speaking of the Gospel, "he neither received it of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ^a." At the time indeed that our Lord was giving his commission to his disciples, we do not hear of St. Paul; nor was it till the faith of Christ, and the followers and preachers of that faith, began to be persecuted, that his character comes before us as a helper in that persecution; most zealous in the Jews' religion, most inveterate against Christianity. Now, whether the revelation of what our blessed Lord did, the same night that he was betrayed, made a part of that general communication of Christian truths, which he calls "the Gospel^b," or whether it was told him by inspiration, at a separate time, and simply by itself, does not appear quite certain. From the Apostle's own words it seems as if the latter were more probable, because his language is so particularly strong. "I have received of the Lord," he says, just before

^a Galat. i. 12.

^b Galat. i. 11.

the text begins, "I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered to you." As if at one particular time God had made known his will upon this special subject of the Lord's Supper. At any rate, it is clear, that at what time soever the Divine will was declared to him, the institution of the Lord's Supper made a particularly prominent part of that revelation.

We can conceive no other reason for this subject being so strongly engraven on the Apostle's spirit, than that it should be most deeply considered by all to whom his words or his writings should extend. God would never have made the sacramental commemoration of the death of his dear Son Jesus so striking a part of his revelation to St. Paul, had he not meant that Christians should thoughtfully consider the great benefits of that death, and avail themselves of that ceremony, by which their Saviour's suffering for sin, and their own interest in that suffering, are so strongly set forth. The impression upon the mind of any

sincere and candid person that had been asking wisdom of God, and trying to know what was Christianly right to do, must be, after the reading the passage before us, Surely it concerns me to take the advantage which is offered me in this Sacrament. If Jesus Christ not only instituted this holy communion almost at his dying hour, but by his Spirit given to his Apostle particularly enjoined its perpetual obligation upon men's conscience and practice, I cannot, I must not, neglect it, if I value my Christian name and calling, if I wish to please my God and Saviour, or expect to be treated as a good and faithful servant. There is clearly something more in this Sacrament than I had supposed; my soul, my everlasting condition, is more concerned in it than I had imagined; I cannot neglect it and be guiltless, however I may attend to other Christian duties and services. These will not help me, if I neglect another which is so pointedly enjoined upon me. May God give his blessed Spirit to open my under-

standing, and to turn my heart, that I may know what it is he will have me do in this important matter.

Well then, for the sake of some who may not so well understand why it is that Christians are so much in duty bound to "remember" their Lord in the particular ceremony of his Supper, I trust the better informed part of my audience will bear with me, while I endeavour to state plainly what the Scripture says about it. And first, as to the time when it was instituted. We read in three of the Evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, and St. Luke, that our Saviour, the evening before he was crucified, was with his disciples commemorating the feast of the Passover. This feast had been instituted by God in remembrance of the deliverance of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt, and was commanded to be kept as a "feast to the Lord throughout their generations, by an ordinance for ever:" for it was, indeed, by a most signal

act of mercy that the Israelites' lives had been spared, when the first-born of all the Egyptians had been smitten ; and by a most signal interposition of God was it, that they had been empowered to set forth upon their perilous journey from Egypt through the Red sea and through the wilderness. With the celebration of that feast there must have been always associated in the heart of every true Israelite the deepest reflections upon the greatness and the goodness of God, vouchsafed at that especial time to the Jewish nation, and ever since, not only the nation at large, but to every individual of that people. " If the Lord had not been on our side," we may imagine them to say, when the annual celebration of their deliverance was solemnized ; " If the Lord himself had not been on our side, when the destroying angel passed through the land of Egypt, and smote the Egyptians, but delivered our houses ; we had been even as they. Who were we that we should go forth from the house of bondage, with ten thousands of

oppressors all around us? Who were we that, with our loins girded, our shoes on our feet, and our staff in our hand, should venture upon a journey, we knew not whither, we knew not how? Before us was the Red sea, behind us the overwhelming foe. If the Lord himself had not been on our side, the waters of the sea would have destroyed us, as they did the horses and hosts of Pharaoh. The burning sun by day and the cold by night, in the wilderness, would have wasted away our flesh; famine would have brought us low; the whirlwind would have swept us off, and buried us beneath the barren sands. It was thine arm, O Lord, that sheltered us, that defended us from the perils of the storm, the perils of the sky, the perils of the wilderness. When we came towards the promised land, it was thou who leddest us to the victory against the giant-sons of Anak and Amalek, and the cities great, and walled up to heaven. Thou, in thy mercy, didst lead forth the people which thou didst redeem; thou

guidedst them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation^d. Thou didst bring us in, and plant us in the mountain of thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou didst make for thee to dwell in; in the sanctuary, O Lord, which thine hands had established^e. But it was not for our righteousness that the Lord brought us in to possess this land; nor for the uprightness of our hearts, for we were a stiff-necked people^f."

Now there could not have been a time better fitted, than the celebration of this Passover, for our blessed Lord's purpose of directing the thoughts of his disciples to a redemption much more wonderful, and much more complete, than the one on which their minds were necessarily engaged. That redemption; indeed, which he was about to effect for them; and for all that should believe on him, was not yet accomplished; but it was accomplished; or the great event which immediately led to

^d Exod. xv. 13. ^e Ver. 17. ^f Dent. ix. 4.

its accomplishment was finished, a few hours after our Lord had eaten the Passover with them. And so we should bear in mind, that the feast of the Passover was ordered to be commemorated, many days before the death of the first-born took place, and the Israelites went out of the land of Egypt. If in this case they might not have fully understood the meaning of the Paschal ceremony, (and, indeed, being as yet strangers to the full deliverance which was afterwards effected for them, they must have been somewhat in the dark as to its meaning,) so the disciples, it is reasonable to suppose, could not fully have comprehended the nature of our Lord's proceedings, at that his last supper, just because his crucifixion had not then taken place. But when, afterwards, their understandings had been opened to understand the Scriptures; when afterwards they came to know the dreadful nature of sin, and that it was for sin that their Saviour had died, that Christ their Passover, their Paschal Lamb, had been sacrificed for his

people; then they would at once see the reason why the commemoration of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for the deliverance of his people out of spiritual bondage, should have been appointed at the Jewish feast of the Passover. We, my brethren, see the wisdom and the unity of God's purposes in such an arrangement, (because the whole of God's revealed purpose to man is before us in the Bible;) and we cannot but thankfully admire that wisdom, which, by one sacred ordinance, awakens in our souls the recollection of all the merciful deliverances which have been vouchsafed to the Church, from the days of Moses unto the present time, and keeps us, as Israelites indeed, in all the spiritual privileges and blessings of the new covenant.

But to enquire more particularly into the nature of this Sacrament. The Passover-feast was, as we have seen, kept in remembrance of an earthly deliverance, a redemption from the slavery of earthly oppressors. The feast which is engrafted upon that

cérémonie, and which Christians are required to keep, was instituted in remembrance of a spiritual deliverance, of a redemption from the power of sin and of the devil. Not that it was intended to supersede the recollection of any of God's ancient mercies to his Church: but as the greater mercy makes the lesser to be somewhat lost sight of in comparison of itself; so when we call to mind, by the help of this Sacrament, what has been done for us, the thoughts of the greatness of our own redemption leave no room for the entertainment of what may be called minor considerations. This holy ceremony reminds us, not of Egypt, not of Pharaoh, but of a captivity far more dreadful, and of an oppressor far more terrible. It reminds us, that we were holden in bondage of sin, that we were the children and the slaves of the devil, but that Jesus Christ has set us free, having broken our chains, and overcome the evil one. It brings home to our consciences the comfortable assurance, that all the evils which the fall of man

brought upon the world are done away, partly in this life, but perfectly in the life to come, because Jesus Christ, having offered up himself as a Lamb without spot or blemish, and having atoned for us in his own person, hath obtained for us a crown of righteousness, which shall be given to all that love his appearing. It continues within the devout communicant's heart those feelings of utter hatred against sin, which made so great an atonement as the death of the Son of God necessary. It keeps up the remembrance of his being a new creature, in a new condition, in a spiritual atmosphere, (as it were,) now that he has been led out with a high hand from the land of darkness and the shadow of death. It is the sign and seal of the ever-flowing mercies of his Saviour, who has died for him, and who forsakes him not, but is ready to bestow on him that grace which his soul needs, and to strengthen that communion, by which it is brought daily and hourly into more humble reliance upon redeeming mercy, and by

which he is enabled to let his light shine forth to the glory of God and the good of men. It is the pledge of his own sorrow for past sins, of his determination by God's grace to serve him more faithfully than he has ever yet done, of his love to man, of his having forgiven them all their trespasses against himself, of his anxiety never to offend them. It leads him from strength to strength through the wilderness; nor doth his spiritual manna fail, till he eat of the fruit of the new land, whither he at last arrives by the goodness of God.

These are the general benefits of the Lord's Supper. It is time to consider, how each particular part of the account of its institution is calculated to awaken that tenderness of heart, that faith, gratitude, and love, with which its celebration ought to be accompanied. Our Lord then, we read, "took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it." Now, for the nourishment of the

Josh. v. 12.

natural body, what substance is there to which more general recourse is had than bread? This then should remind us, that as bread is to the body, so is the Saviour to the soul. It is he who nourishes the spiritual frame: it is owing to his mediation that the soul is not doomed to languish and pine away in unrelieved and unperished want, or perish from a famine of the word of God. It is the truth concerning Jesus that staves the appetite of the Christian that hungers and thirsts after righteousness, without which support it would hunger and thirst in vain. Again, bread is one of the commonest articles of subsistence, not like luxuries only within the reach of a few, but contributing materially to the support of the richest as well as the poorest. What else can this remind us of than of the free access which we all have to Christ, of the merciful offers which he freely makes to all,

† See Watson's Addresses on Subjects connected with the Lord's Supper.

of the suitableness of the terms which he proposes to us?

For signifying the necessity which we are under of deriving our spiritual support from our blessed Lord, there could not then have been selected a fitter token than the substance of bread: and bread broken reminds us also very forcibly, that he who gave his life a ransom for our sakes, gave it not up till he had been wearied, and buffeted, and persecuted with the utmost malevolence. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed^h." To describe in how many instances his precious body was "broken" during his abode upon earth, would be to enter into a history of his whole painful life and death; but from the Evangelist's account we see how it was broken by privations, sorrows, and insults. How it was broken when he was betrayed

^h Isaiah liii. 3.

into the hands of his enemies, when he was mocked, and scourged, when his sweat fell as it were great drops of blood to the ground, when he was exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and, lastly, when he was nailed to the cross, and they stood staring and looking upon him; when the soldier with a spear pierced his side; when he bowed the head, and gave up the ghost. When he brake the bread, therefore, in prophetic token of all that was about to happen to himself, we cannot but see how that action sets him before the eyes of his faithful servants, as the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, the Son of God crucified for our sins.

In whatever manner the cup was used at the feast of the Passover, by our Lord's institution it has clearly enjoined upon his disciples the remembrance of spiritual mercies greater than the Israelites knew. It is "the new testament in his blood." It signifies, that he shed his blood to bring us into a new and better relation with God: that the covenant ratified by his blood-shed-

ding is different from the old covenant, by which God had united himself to his people: that as wine is to the fainting and drooping spirits a cup of joy, a cup of refreshment, a cup of strengthening, so is the atoning blood of our Saviour to our weak and languid souls.

As far as we have now gone, we have considered the importance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and the nature of it, together with the time of its institution: it will remain for future occasions, by God's help, to set before you many other considerations connected with this subject; and may his Holy Spirit dispose us to regard the solemnity with more devout dispositions of heart, every time it is in our power to eat of that bread and drink of that cup, which are the strengthening, the refreshing, the salvation of our souls, through Jesus-Christ our Saviour.

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L. J. V.

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SERMON II.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 COR. xi. 26.

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

FROM the verses preceding this text, I took occasion to explain, last Sunday, the importance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the time of its institution, what its general signification and nature were, and the fitness of the symbols of bread and wine to express our Lord's body broken, and his precious blood shed for the sins of mankind.

I now proceed to shew, first of all, how the true notion of a Sacrament is contained

in the words before us ; and for this purpose shall take the latter part of the text, wherein its meaning seems to be chiefly comprised. What is meant, then, by the words, "ye do shew the Lord's death till he come?"

In answering this question, the difficulty is to say what is there not included in it that can fill the hearts of Christians with every affectionate feeling connected with their faith. It is a public profession on the part of the communicants, that they believe in a crucified Lord. It is a declaration of their belief in him as the sacrifice for their sins. It is an open testimony on their part that they believe on him "that was dead and is alive again," who liveth for ever and ever ; who is at the right hand of God, for ever making intercession for them ; who by his Spirit is near to comfort them, and to be for ever with them in this valley of the shadow of death, and when they go hence into the unseen and unknown world of spirits, and when the final judgment shall have awarded to every man according to his works. It is

a confession of their own willingness, in the spirit of the Apostle's exhortation, "to walk worthy of the calling wherewith they have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; even as they have all the same common hopes, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all ^b." To what duty, with regard to God, do they not pledge themselves, by partaking in the sacramental bread and wine? To what duty, as concerns their neighbour, do they not oblige themselves? As commemorating the death of their crucified Saviour, what other practice can they follow, but one of entire humility and mortification, as far as can resemble themselves to him? And, as far as relates to their brethren, what other conduct can they shew, than unity of heart and of charity, doing nothing "through strife
 when the final judgment shall have awarded
 to every man according to his works. ^a Ephes. iv.

or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind each man considering other better than himself^b ?”

By such fruits as these do those who frequent the Lord's Supper shew forth his death till he come: they live, that is, in a state of Christian preparation, in active piety and charity; they die in the true faith, and they sleep in the Lord. With them, it is evident, the ordinance is not merely an eating of some consecrated bread, nor a drinking of a portion of consecrated wine; (which would be merely to use the outward signs of the Sacrament, without regarding the inward and spiritual grace which they signified.) And yet in the text “the shewing forth the Lord's death till he come,” is stated as the result simply of this eating and drinking the consecrated substances. But, if the mere eating and drinking these was all that was required; if the Lord's death could be shewn forth till he come, simply by complying

^b Philippians ii. 3.

with the externals of the ordinance ; all those devout and godly dispositions, with which communicants are required to receive the Sacrament, might be dispensed with. St. Paul, however, expressly says that they cannot be dispensed with ; on the contrary, that they are indispensably necessary. He is most urgent upon Christians to remember, that they are not to receive it as a common meal, but as a spiritual and heavenly feast. He must have meant then when he said, “ as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup,” that as oft as they did so, using it as the most gracious mean of spiritual life, they shewed forth the Lord’s death till he come. He could only have spoken of such communicants as with true penitent hearts and lively faith received that holy Sacrament, and who, in consequence, spiritually did eat his flesh and drank his blood : for, of all others who attended the holy ordinance without right dispositions of heart, by the grace of God, he expressly declares, that they “ eat and drink their own judgment,” not con-

sidering the Lord's body. What the meaning of a man's eating and drinking unworthily, or, as it is translated, eating and drinking damnation to himself, I will do my best to explain, when we come to that part of our subject. At present we are come to the conclusion, that St. Paul speaks only of those communicants who attended the Lord's Supper with right qualifications ; and, at the same time, we see how the true notion which the Church Catechism gives of a Sacrament is contained in the verse before us. Thus ; if they alone shew forth the Lord's death till he come who eat and drink at the Lord's table, it is in virtue of that inward and spiritual grace received thereby, and of which the bread and wine are the outward signs. Natural substances can support the natural body alone : what we are chiefly in want of is the strengthening and refreshing of our souls, by the heavenly doctrine and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose precious body has been broken for us, and whose blood has been shed for us. And it is only

when our hearts are deeply impressed with a sense of our need of that support, and that without the grace bestowed by the Sacrament we can neither love God nor our neighbour as we are commanded, that the declaration of our faith, made by our attending the Lord's Supper, is of that acceptable character, which the Apostle is evidently describing:

As oft then as we eat the bread and drink of the cup whereby our Lord's sacrifice is set forth, and our interest in him, and our connection with one another as brethren, as oft as we do this with proper dispositions, and then only, so often do we give practical proof of our believing all things concerning our blessed Lord, and of desire to love him and our brethren in Christ. My brethren, do we not desire to acquit ourselves in all our religious acts with sincerity of heart? Do we not long to be among those with whom our Lord is well pleased? Can we wish for any thing else than to discover how, in this world of trial and sorrow, we may

obtain a settled peace of conscience, and pass through all the difficulties which surround us unhurt and undismayed? Is there any thing more cheering to our hearts than seeing men around us in peace and goodwill towards us, and to feel that we have done our endeavour, by God's assistance, to create or to cherish this harmony?

Let us enter then somewhat particularly upon those dispositions of heart, which are essential towards our answering the description of true communicants. We must believe then, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died upon the cross for the sins of mankind; and we must individually lay it to our own souls, that it was for each of us that he died, because we are every one of us under the penalty of Adam's transgression. It is something more, however, than merely believing this that is required of us. Every one that repeats the Apostles' Creed [at church], is in one sense a believer, because he declares that his faith is firmly fixed on all the particulars of his

Saviour's sufferings and death ; but as the Christian life does not consist in making professions and declarations, but in action, we must prove ourselves by our doings to be something better than believers by name. Do we then believe, that Christ died for us? Does each person here present believe, that Christ died for him? Then the best proof that he can give of his belief is his hatred of sin, which made his Saviour's death necessary. He may perhaps think the matter over in some such way as this. How can I continue any longer in sin, when even the Son of God, who was perfectly without sin, yet died to atone for God's anger against it? Sin, I know, is "the transgression of the law;" the doing any thing which God has forbidden in his revealed word. I know that he has forbidden murder, adultery, fornication, theft, swearing, lying, drunkenness, profaneness, idleness, covetousness, worldliness of mind; and that the commandment which forbids these, and every other kind of wickedness, enjoins the virtues and graces

which are directly contrary to evil. I know, that when God forbids adultery, that he commands us to aim at purity of heart and the holiest chastity. I know, that when he forbids theft, that the commandment enjoins upon us the most scrupulous and conscientious honesty and integrity in our dealings. And so on of all the other things forbidden and enjoined. How then can I wilfully continue in the neglect of God's will, and say, I believe that Christ died, when I am no way affected in my daily conduct by a sense of what he has done for me? I am convinced, that the only thing for me to do is to die unto sin, that is, to renounce it, to forsake it, to put it away from me; for God's anger is awfully declared against it, in that he spared not his only-begotten Son, who vouchsafed to die in our stead. His wrath, I see, is eternally revealed from heaven "against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men." I deserve to die, for I have been guilty of numbers of actual transgressions against God, my neighbour, and my-

self; while I know not how many I have committed unawares, to which my own original guilty fallen nature has prompted me. I cannot of myself make any recompence to God for all that he has done, but I will strive to have nothing to do with sin any longer; for this is the only good proof I can give of my believing that Jesus Christ died for me. I will, by God's grace, "shew forth his death till he come," by changing my course of life, forsaking those things by which I am conscious of having broken his laws and grieved his Spirit, and proving myself to be influenced by a wholly different mind from what I have hitherto.

With considerations of this kind, there will be mingled feelings of very great sorrow for having mispent his time, and abused the mercy of God, and of very great alarm lest God should cut him off without sparing him any time for repentance, when he knows that he must be for ever and ever in the torments of hell.

The train of reflections which I have been

supposing, is that to which a man would naturally enough give way, that had been continually neglectful of the Lord's Supper, and was resolved to lose no time in shewing forth his death in a true Christian manner. But even the most constant communicants, and those who by their lives were giving practical evidence of their faith, hope, and charity, would not be altogether without thoughts of the same kind. True contrition, that is, should take possession of the heart of every one, who "minds to come to the holy communion," united to a sincere faith in the efficacy of the blood of Christ to cleanse his polluted soul from the stain of original and of actual sin, a stedfast determination by his grace to avoid every occasion of offending Him, and continual watchfulness and prayer against the crafts and subtleties of the devil, who goeth about as a roaring lion seeking to devour those that are off their guard. The more, indeed, a Christian advances in love to God and charity towards men, the more unworthy

does he feel himself to partake in this holy communion, and, in fact, in every religious act, that brings him into close union with heaven. As he rises higher in the scale of moral conduct, he sees the view of his duties expand before him wider and wider; he discovers new reasons why God alone is to be loved, worshipped, and adored as the only object which can entirely satisfy the heart; he finds out how multitudinous are the claims which the wants and miseries of man make upon his time, his interest, his energies, his prayers. He looks upon himself as a member of a mighty community, the wholeness and comfort of which he is to study, however remote his influence may be felt. His kindness, his meekness, his patience, his heavenliness of conduct, are the blessing of those who come immediately within the sphere of his action; but his endeavour is always to do more and more for them, and for every one. All the particulars of his own duties will rise before such an one when he has the opportunity of

commemorating his Lord's death. Foreseeing where he may be tempted to fall, he will arm himself against the probable event by a special thought of devotion, and casting himself on the parental care of God. Reflecting upon the selfishness of his past life, he will pray more intensely that the evil may be pardoned, and that he may know better how to deny himself for the future. What thoughts of self-condemnation abide with him, when he thinks he might have filled up to the brim the cup of joy in the hands of others around him, but has made it gall and bitterness! What thoughts of contrite gratitude, that God Almighty forgives him all for Christ Jesus' sake! How does he meditate upon the blessed occasions whereby he may shew himself ever afterwards possessed of a more heavenly spirit of tenderness and compassion! With what deep anxiety does he pray, that his return to the world may be marked with greater watchfulness in every thing that concerns a Christian; with a holier resignation to die, when-

ever it shall be God's will that he should depart hence ; with a livelier and better-founded hope of everlasting life through Jesus Christ.

But let no man be disheartened by such a representation as I have now made, and conclude, that to shew forth the Lord's death till he come, is a work too arduous for any of the generality of professed Christians. That the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is, we have reason to suppose, sometimes celebrated without any adequate feelings of sorrow for past sin, of anxiety to live more holily and more charitably for the future ; that it is not followed by that deadness to the world and its allurements, which is the plain duty of all that bear the name of Christ ; this, with much else that betokens a want of consideration and anxiety on the subject of eternal life, it must be confessed, has too often characterised the professors of Christianity : but this is a degree of backwardness in their faith, as far below what the most ignorant and simplest Christians

may attain to, as the rule of Christian conduct on which I have been particularly dwelling may be beyond what many have attained to. Still, however, it is to be arrived at, as every degree of holiness and righteousness of life is to be arrived at. And let not him that feels in his own case a dulness towards heavenly things, an indifference to that on which his soul should be fixed without wavering, despair of surmounting the obstacles with which his faith has to contend. Let him, above all things, doubt not, that to the worthy communicant, who has been long practised and long familiar in the heavenly dispensation of the sacramental food, such blessings as have been described are vouchsafed; nor fear, that in his own case, he too will experience them, if he is patient and watchful unto prayer.

What the sin of those is, who receive the outward and visible signs of the Lord's Supper, but who do not shew forth his death till he come, (inasmuch as they have none

of those Christian dispositions of heart which can make theirs an acceptable service,) must be reserved for another occasion. I will conclude by praying, that the Lord may be pleased to dispose all our hearts towards the obedience of his holy will, that the opportunity of communicating at the sacred memorial of his death and passion may be hailed with the sincerest gratitude by those who have already, as well as by those who have not hitherto, received that holy Sacrament. And may this holy season find us continually preparing our hearts through grace, that Easter may dawn upon us dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord !

THE FUTURE

THE FUTURE OF THE FUTURE

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The future of the future is a topic that has been discussed for centuries. It is a topic that has fascinated philosophers, scientists, and the general public alike. The future is a subject that is both mysterious and exciting. It is a subject that has the potential to change the way we think about the world and our place in it. The future is a subject that is both challenging and rewarding. It is a subject that has the potential to change the way we live and the way we think.

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SERMON III.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 COR. xi. 27, 29.

Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

WHEN St. Paul says, in the verse preceding the text, "as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew forth the Lord's death till he come," we must understand him to mean, that true Christians alone "shew it forth," who eat and drink the consecrated substance at the Lord's Supper

with such devout dispositions of soul and spirit, as are necessary to the right celebration of a spiritual and heavenly feast. The passage of Scripture which is now before us would at once settle this to be the Apostle's meaning, as it speaks of unworthy receivers, though the external act, namely, of eating bread and drinking wine, is exactly the same, whether done by sincere believers or by hypocrites; that is, it is the same external act in all essential parts. It is to the worthy as to the unworthy communicant that the same solemn address is used by the minister, at the time of the celebration of the ordinance. In the same form of prayer, so truly contrite and confessional, do they both move their lips. They kneel before the Lord's table, without any distinguishing mark whereby the eye of man can say, who is or who is not prepared in heart. They receive the same symbols of the Saviour's life-giving sacrifice, the broken bread, the cup of wine. They speak the same words of thanksgiving, and upon them both are the same words of blessing.

and comfort pronounced. In all this, my brethren, there is one that seeth not as man seeth ; one, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." Must it not then be the first concern with every person, who " minds to come to the holy Communion," to prepare his heart in such a way, as that when God looks upon it, he may be well pleased to see the state to which it has been brought by his grace? Must not every communicant be really and deeply anxious that his soul may derive the life and strength which the Sacrament gives? Will not every one long to feel, that the address which is read, finds an answering chord in his own heart? to feel, that the prayers of confession and supplication go forth from a broken and contrite spirit within him? to feel, that Jesus Christ, applied in his blessed ordinance to the guilty and weak soul, is " meat indeed and drink indeed?" to feel, that it is spiritual strengthening and refreshing? And, not to confine the beneficial effects of the Lord's Supper to mere

feeling; to devout and heavenly sensations and emotions during the time of its celebration, will he not long to find himself running his Christian race with more patience and perseverance all his life afterwards? There is no one, who has a real wish to fear God and keep his commandments, to love the Lord Jesus Christ, to grieve not the holy Spirit of God, who can help desiring to receive the real good which the Sacrament can give. Whoever knows that he has a soul to be saved, will one day or other wish in good earnest that he had taken thought and pains about his salvation; that his religion had been something more than in profession; that his solemn acts of devotion had been performed with holier motives than he remembers to have been possessed with.

In the sacred ordinance now under consideration, let us consider at present what it is that constitutes the unworthiness of communicants, that we may learn to avoid their sin and condemnation: what is meant by being "guilty of the body and blood of the

of the Lord's Supper.

Lord," that we flee from that guilt; what that damnation is incurred by eating and drinking so as not to discern the Lord's body, that we may never fall into such terrible punishment.

Now if I were to say, that in these days it is extremely improbable that any persons could be such unworthy receivers of the sacramental bread and wine, or by any misconduct of theirs could bring upon themselves the judgment and condemnation of which St. Paul speaks, and which were common in his days, I should be very near the truth: by saying that it would be impossible, I should perhaps be saying the exact truth. I do not mean to assert, that persons may not be in a very unfit state to receive the Lord's Supper, nor that they can possibly be free from guilt by receiving it without due thought and preparation; but whatever their misconduct may be, and whatever punishment they may derive in consequence, both in their sin and in their suffering, they must be in certain respects unlike the primitive profaners of the Lord's Supper.

Let us consider, in the first place, in what respects the sin of unworthy communicants of the present day is unlike that of unworthy communicants of St. Paul's day. In those early times, then, it was usual for Christians to assemble together at a common meal, to which each person brought as he felt disposed, or according to his ability, a small or large quantity of provisions. Out of these, a certain part was set aside, for the purpose of commemorating our Lord's death by the holy Sacrament. The design of this meeting together at a common feast was to express the kindly feelings which Christians had for each other, to keep up a communion of affection and love, and especially to evince towards the poor and needy among them, that they considered them members of their body, and heirs together with them of the promises of their faith. Every contributor was also understood to devote what he brought to a religious use ; he was to divest himself of all property in it, and to give it up as common to all who were assembled. For any one, therefore, in the celebration of the Lord's

Supper, to consider, that if he contributed more than his poorer neighbour, he had a right to receive more ; and, acting upon this notion, to think himself at liberty to eat and drink as at a common meal, forgetful of the spiritual importance of the Sacrament, and absolutely denying his needy brethren their due share ; was a sin totally at variance with those dispositions, which were required to make this solemnity accord with the will of the Lord in appointing it. Such conduct was a profanation of the symbols of the body and blood of Christ, which is the meaning of the expression “ guilty of the body and blood of Christ,” and rendered the offender amenable to the punishment due to such an irreverence, and abuse of the highest means of grace.

Now in whatever manner Christians may be offenders in the present day in the matter of the Sacrament, they clearly cannot offend as their earlier brethren did. The mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper now is widely different from what it was then. The bread

and wine are not brought by each communicant as a religious offering, but provided for the common use of all, and administered in such a manner, as that the possibility is obviated of any such irregularities being committed now as were usual in ancient times. The poorest cannot now be dismissed without receiving their due share; the wealthiest cannot receive more than the most needy. High and low, rich and poor, without distinction, cannot separate from this part of their Saviour's love, without an equal share in the symbols of his divine mercy. It follows, that whoever now unworthily receives them, does so in a different manner, with regard to the particulars now mentioned, from that in which the sin was committed in primitive times.

And if the sin be different, the punishment annexed to it is different also. In the early ages of Christianity, the Lord was pleased, for the maintenance of the purity of his Church, and of the authority of his Apostles, to visit with temporal and extraordinary

punishments offences against the faith which he had established. Thus Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for lying unto the Holy Ghost^a, it being the will of God, that no insincere and hypocritical members should belong to his infant Church. So St. Paul writes to the authorities in the Corinthian Church, to deliver the fornicator unto satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus^b. He speaks of himself as being possessed of this authority, as having been given to him by the Lord for the edification, and not for the destruction, of his people^c. He says to those who had been disorderly, that if he came to them again, he would not spare them^d. St. John tells us, that if a man see his brother sinning a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life, if the sin be not unto death^e; evidently referring to the extraordinary power which had been conferred on the

^a Acts v. 5.

^b 1 Cor. v. 5.

^c 2 Cor. x. 8.

^d 2 Cor. xiii. 2.

^e 1 John v. 16.

Apostle. In fact, the general rule in all matters of importance that related to the well-being of the Church was, that whatever the Apostles should "bind on earth should be bound in heaven, and whatsoever they loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven:" that is, whatever they, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, should appoint as a Christian rule, or dispense with as being no longer necessary under the Gospel, should be ratified on high; God himself would approve of it, and allow the act of his appointed servants to be his own.

Christianity being now firmly established in the world, and being allowed in the wisdom of its divine Founder to make its way in the hearts of men by the power of its own evidences, under the influence of his Spirit, it does not require any extraordinary or miraculous attestations of its truth, by the visible reward of the righteous or the punishment of the ungodly. "Doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth, verily there is a reward for the righteous." And some-

times even now, the judgment of God as visibly and undeniably arrests the sinner in his career of worldly iniquity, and sometimes even now, his reward as strikingly attends the faithful doer of his will in this life, as in earlier times. But we are taught by the Gospel, my brethren, to look to another life for rewards or for punishments, that is to say, the fear of eternal punishment, and the hope of eternal happiness, unmixed with any judicial expectations of punishment or reward in this life, to animate us to the dread of sin and the love of holiness ; while at the same time we have no authority for pronouncing the afflictions of this present life the judicial punishment of sins, nor the prosperity of this life the express token of God's good pleasure. Hence, in the matter of unworthily receiving the Lord's Supper, we are not to look necessarily for that judgment, or, as it is translated, damnation, (a much stronger and more terrible word to our ears than in its original meaning,) spoken of in the text, and which is explained immedi-

ately after by the expressions, "for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep;" that is, the punishment of death has been inflicted upon them for their sin. We have no sanction from the Gospel for any expectation of such temporal punishment as this in these days: we have no reason to look for that visible "judgment" and "chastening," which befel the guilty in the Apostle's time, though we know that "vengeance is the Lord's, and that he will repay;" and that "he will reward every man according to his works:" because we are instructed to look beyond this world, both for final punishment, and for final reward. Indeed, it may please the Almighty to punish even as he will in this life, or to reward in this world as seemeth good to him; but, in the ordinary dealings of his providence, it does not appear from his revealed will, that we are authorized to expect either the one or the other, in this state of trial, in decided testimony of his approval or his wrath.

What then, it may be asked, have the words of St. Paul concerning eating and drinking unworthily, eating and drinking damnation to one's self, not considering the Lord's body, no reference at all to ourselves of the present day? If we cannot sin after the likeness of the sin of those Corinthians, and, consequently, are in no danger of being like them in their punishment, how does our conduct at all come within the scope of the observation in the text?

This is what we proposed to consider at the outset. In answer, then, to these questions, it may be replied, that there are different modes in shewing a want of proper disposition in attending the Lord's table, and all of them highly derogatory to the honour of God, and all of them rendering us amenable to his wrath. That man eats and drinks unworthily, not considering the Lord's body, who does not remember, that it was for his sins that Jesus Christ died upon the cross; who feels no sorrow that his life has been so little influenced by the motives of the Gospel;

who makes no sincere resolutions to rule himself by its precepts for the future ; and such an one, if he habitually communicates, and notwithstanding gets no clear notions respecting the atonement, and lives no holier life in consequence, does certainly abuse a very great mercy and privilege ; and, if he dies before he turns from the error of his way, there is every reason to believe, from the Gospel, that he has greatly endangered his salvation by his sinful conduct. I put rather an extreme case ; for it is not easy to believe, that any one will habitually be found at the Lord's table, and not be, in some degree at least, progressively improving ; and if he gets on at all by the grace of God upon his very imperfect endeavours, his advance is sufficient to redeem him from the imputation of being an unworthy receiver, (in the sense in which the word is commonly used.) But where such slow and spiritless improvement as this is not made, God forbid that any of us should ever rest satisfied with ourselves with such a tardy increase in god-

liness ! where, I say, such progress even as this is not made, where the heart, after all, continues hard and dull and senseless towards God, and shut up towards mankind, there are unequivocal proofs of unworthy receiving.

That man receives the holy symbols of the Lord's body and blood unworthily, who forgives not his brethren their trespasses against him, even as he hopes to be forgiven of God ; who makes no amends for the wrongs which he has done them ; restores not to them that which he may have taken, whether it be from their character and reputation, or their personal property. There is an unworthiness in him who receives with envy in his heart, with malice, with hatred. He that never restricts himself habitually by the rules of temperance and sobriety in his diet ; that wastes his precious hours in indolence or in sleep ; that lets his talents lie buried in the earth ; that wraps himself up in his own self-esteem, and habitually disregards the claims upon him

which all around him are making ; the offender in each of these ways is an unworthy receiver, because he considers not, that in the Sacrament, as his Lord and Saviour's death is set forth, so is he required to mortify all vices within himself, whereof those enumerated are a part. And if, when the blessed ceremony is finished, one returns to his strong drink and his full meals, as the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire ; and another sinks down again into his dream of inactivity and vacancy of life, as if he had nothing to do for the glory of God, or the good of man ; and another rises to his ancient feuds and quarrels and hatreds, as if he had not been where he ought to have forgotten them for ever ; what the end of these things shall be unrepented of, who is there that does not know, or has forgotten, that “ the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness ! ”

There can be no one, who has ever given religion a serious thought, who does not heartily desire to be delivered from such terrible woe. If he stifles his desire while he is young and strong, it will revive when he is weak or dying, and then it may be too late to choose the good, when his course may be nearly run in evil. I will endeavour, in my next discourse upon this important subject, to give some plain rules for self-examination, in order that we may enter into judgment with ourselves, and, by the grace of God upon our humble and sincere endeavours, be daily strengthened and refreshed in all our devotional acts, and be enabled, through Divine mercy, to live in practical remembrance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

SERMON IV.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 COR. xi. 28.

*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat
of that bread and drink of that cup.*

I ENDEAVOURED to shew last Sunday, from the 27th and 29th verses of this chapter, that the sin of unworthy communicants of the present day was unlike that of the Corinthians, to whom St. Paul was immediately writing; and also, that the circumstances, under which Christianity now exists, being different in some material points from its primitive state, we had no reason whatever to expect, that the judicial punishment which was inflicted upon the early profaners of the

Lord's Supper would fall upon persons of the present day, who were guilty of eating and drinking unworthily. That being unlike them, therefore, in their sin, and having no reason to expect their punishment, the fears of being exactly in the same unhappy condition, which now operated in keeping Christians away from the sacramental commemoration of their Lord's death, were entirely unfounded. This was an inference to be naturally drawn, although little has hitherto been said about the unreasonableness of those fears. Unreasonable, however, as they are, the manner in which they still tend to keep persons from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is greatly to be deplored, and cannot be too much spoken against. And yet, after all that has been preached upon the subject, and all that has been written in the wisest, the plainest, and most attractive manner to meet every comprehension; after all the exhortations in public and in private that have been made; how commonly do some persons excuse themselves for

keeping away from this holy ordinance, by alleging their fears lest they eat and drink their own damnation ! How strange is it that Christians, who are not devoid of common understanding in other matters, should allow themselves without due consideration to be kept out of the use of the best means of grace, which have been appointed for the strengthening and refreshing of their souls ! Why will they suffer themselves to be so deceived by the great enemy of their salvation, into the belief, that their Saviour's dying request is one too great to be now complied with, and thus live and die in disobedience of his will ? The answer to this question is the same as may be given to any others concerning the sins, the follies, the inconsistencies of human conduct, when they are practised in spite of better knowledge, viz. the love of the world, the disregard of the appeals of eternal life. Devotion to sensible comforts and pleasures, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, all more or less are inter-

fering with the effect which the word and the Spirit of God should be making. If men would but suffer themselves to think why they leave any plain commandment undone, or continue in the practice of any thing forbidden, the main step towards doing the one and forsaking the other would be made: but the melancholy fact is, that they will not let thought do its work. Habit is so strong with them, that, "as the ox goeth to the slaughter," they will not take pains to retrace their steps; and so they blindly advance, till it is too late, even if they wish it, to recover themselves from their ruinous courses.

I may be at this present time addressing some who have never attended the Supper of the Lord; although they have been confirmed, and perhaps are now advanced many years in life beyond the time when they gave that public testimony of their Christian profession. The reason why they have continued so long in such profane disregard of their Saviour's love has just been stated: but I pray that God may dispose their hearts

to serious reflection and enquiry, that their fears and scruples and objections may be thoroughly sifted, and that they may be persuaded to adopt a wiser and holier course both of thinking and acting.

Let them be assured, however, (and let it be understood by all,) that although the particular kind of sin which the Corinthians used to commit in their profanation of the Lord's Supper cannot be committed now, and also, that although the fears of eating and drinking such "damnation," as St. Paul speaks of, ought not now deter any from the Sacrament, still that it is possible to profane it, and also to incur the displeasure of God in consequence. The Apostle's exhortation, therefore, is still necessary. Men require now as then to be urged to look into their own hearts, to search out their motives, their desires, to discover the tendencies of their minds, their liability to this or to that error, to understand what their peculiar circumstances are ; in short, to make themselves thoroughly masters of

every particular which may help them towards a right preparation for this holy ordinance. For if they do not, because they cannot, profane it in one particular way, they may yet be guilty of so doing in another; and though no temporal judgment fall upon the unworthy receivers now, let them still stand in awe of him "that is able to destroy both body and soul in hell."

Let us proceed then to enquire, in what manner the precept in the text is to be complied with, so as to render the service of communicants an acceptable one through Jesus Christ our Lord.

"Let a man examine himself." Let him find out, that is, whether the thoughts and intents of his heart are such as are required by the Lord in those who partake of the communion of his body and blood. Of what he does require, we have a short summary in the Church Catechism as follows. It is required of them that come to the Lord's Supper, "to examine themselves whether they repent them truly of their former sins,

stedfastly purposing to lead a new life, to have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ, to have a thankful remembrance of his death, and to be in charity with all men." It is not man that enjoins this upon his fellows, but the Lord, who gave himself for us. To be real members of his kingdom, such members, that is, as have substantial grounds on which to build their hopes of eternal life, we must be in an habitual state of repentance, in progressive endeavours to live with a more single aim to the glory of God, in stedfast reliance on the great atonement made for our sins, and in the practice of all charity towards our neighbours. The Christian religion requires no less. They that are Christ's are to have nothing whatever to do with sin, any more than a dead man has to do with the affairs of life. They are by profession "dead to sin." They renounced it utterly when they were taken into God's covenanted mercies in Christ, by the holy sacrament of Baptism. They are pledged to shake off its pollutions whenever through inadvertence or through wilfulness

they have suffered themselves to be contaminated with it; and they know, when they repent, that they "have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, who is the propitiation for their sins." Nor does the Gospel require that its followers should stand still in their course, but that they should be continually improving. They are to be drawing nearer and nearer to perfection, by the grace of God upon their labours; all the while renouncing the merit of what they do, and studying to be like their Saviour, in doing all the good that they can to those around them. If a man does but read his Bible thoughtfully, and with prayer, what feelings of love to God and his neighbour will there not dwell in his heart; what hopes and fears will there not kindle within him; what holy purposes of active charity will he not pursue; and withal what a lowly opinion will he ever have of himself; and what deep gratitude will animate him when he thinks of the great love of God to himself, a miserable sinner!

Now at the celebration of the Lord's

Supper, there is an appeal made to the soul in such a manner, as to awaken every feeling and thought that is enjoined in the Scriptures, and to impress the heart with a sense of the redeeming love of the Saviour, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, the union between Christians and their great Head, and between one another, in the most forcible manner. When St. Paul then exhorts a man to "examine himself" before he partakes in that Sacrament, he urges upon him the necessity of answering that appeal from the depth of his heart. He says to this effect; Your Saviour by this holy feast calls upon you to repent. Have you repented, are you in a state of repentance? He calls upon you to devote yourselves to him more entirely henceforth and for ever. Is this the service which you are heartily desirous to pay? He calls upon you to renounce yourselves, your own merits, and to lean upon his all-sufficient mercy for the forgiveness of your iniquities, and the covering of your sins. Do you believe in him as

the sole meritorious cause of your justification? He calls upon you for a life of gratitude for all his great mercies. Is your heart full of thanksgiving? He calls upon you to love the brotherhood. Is such love your study and your practice?

It is not difficult, then, for any man, who is anxious to do the will of God from his heart, to know in what manner he is to prepare himself for the right celebration of the Lord's Supper. First, as to repentance. Is he living in the practice of any known sin, indulging in the commission of any evil practice? This he can easily ascertain, whether it be intemperance, dishonesty, overreaching, fraud, malice, lying, swearing, or any other of the sins which are too commonly found among us. If he has reason to condemn himself in any particular of the kind now enumerated, his duty is, before he presumes to eat of that bread and drink of that cup, to set before him what God has declared against such sinful practice, and to beseech him to pardon it. United to such a

prayer, there must be the most unfeigned sorrow for having done what is so displeasing to God; and the most sincere determination never again to offend him in like manner. No one can help knowing wherein he has been a transgressor. Let him not be too proud to confess it; and let him fall down before his Maker, in unfeigned regret that he has so offended him, and in hearty resolution to do so no more. Let him bring before him all the circumstances of his transgression; where it was committed; under what particular excitement; with the omission of what particular cautions; with the neglect of what particular fears and apprehensions; and let him contemplate the possibility of a recurrence of any or most of them, and guard against it. He has been a drunkard, suppose. While he laments, then, that he has degraded himself in the scale of creation, made himself lower than the brute beasts that perish, darkened within him all spiritual light and knowledge, his determined resolution, by God's assistance, will be, to go no where, to keep no company, to

consent to no offer of any kind, to make no concession, of ever so trifling a nature, that may be the occasion of his falling again as he has done before. He will deny himself both in quantity and in quality, lest he fall inadvertently into excess. If the fear of God will not influence him sufficiently, he will bring in every worldly consideration which may be of service: the terrors of poverty, disrespect, the shame of being a by-word and a proverb among all sober and orderly persons, all these will induce him to flee from his hateful vice, and to study to be temperate and chastened. Thus, with a knowledge of his sin, and with a hatred of it, and with an earnest determination, by God's grace, to set himself against the commission of it again, he may be considered as a true penitent in the matter now under discussion, and, as far as concerns his conduct herein, has within him all the essentials which make his receiving the Sacrament an acceptable service, through the merits of Jesus Christ his Saviour.

I have mentioned but one instance of self-

enquiry, and self-condemnation; but it is evident, that the same process which is followed in this respect, and which leads a man heartily to be ashamed of his sin, and to desire to have done with it for ever, is to be adopted in every case where the conscience condemns, and where the practice has been obviously in violation of God's holy and pure commandments. Is a man's heart not right with God, through worldliness of mind, through pride, vain-glory, or hypocrisy; through envy, hatred, malice, uncharitableness; through the guilt of lying, or swearing, or pilfering, or stealing? If he would "examine himself," then, before he presumes to eat of that bread and drink of that cup, he will set before himself the hateful-ness, in the sight of God, of any one of the sins enumerated, and put the possibility of his falling into it again before him in every point of view, and arm himself against it by special prayers, and watchings. Whatever may have been his particular sin or sins, the result of his self-examination, with a view

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to communicating at the Lord's table, will be a detestation of his evil conduct, and a prostration of himself upon the merciful offers of forgiveness made by his Saviour to the true penitent, and a fear and trembling for the future.

But, what if a man feels no sorrow for his past life, and no anxiety to live more holy for the future : suppose his conscience of sin is not so acute as to lead him to the sole sacrifice for sin, and the sole foundation of peace and happiness : suppose his ignorance of his fallen state is so lamentable, as that he feels no sincere gratitude for the wonderful scheme of redemption in which he has been included : and suppose he is not alive to the claims of his brethren, all around him, for the exercise of his love and charity, and for the substantial help of his money, his food and clothing, his influence and his interference : is such a one in a fit state to receive the Sacrament ? The answer must be made in the negative. Such a person is not fit. And if, with the knowledge that he

ought to have prepared himself better than he has, and with the ability to have done so, he has neglected to come to the commemoration of his Saviour's dying request in such a state as was required of him ; let him not rest satisfied till, by an act of sincere repentance, he has brought God, for Christ's sake, to impute not to him the sinfulness of his omissions. And yet no one has any reason to despair, if he cannot bring with him to this holy feast all those contrite, and pious, and charitable dispositions that he wishes ; nor to absent himself at once, if he does not feel them. It is the plain duty of every Christian to communicate, as much as it is his duty to frequent the house of prayer ; to abstain from open or private sin ; to keep his heart, or his lips, or his hands, in a due state of subjection and control. And if there be at times a sensible deficiency in the fervour of a man's devotions ; a coldness and dulness of spiritual affections ; a fear that his hatred of sin has not been deep enough, his resolution to amend not hearty

enough ; still, for all this, so gracious a means of divine help, and such a furtherance on the road to salvation, as the Lord's Supper is, must not be neglected, if the general prayer and purport of the heart be "to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and keep his commandments." For any one habitually to keep away from this blessed ordinance, is habitually to profess, before God and the Church, that all other religious observances which he pays are not sincere; that he does not mean to love God, or to fear him, when he professes to do so in the public prayers of the Church ; that his private or public confessions of sorrow for sin, his private or public devotions of every kind, do not spring from a heart that is "whole with God."

How a Christian's examination in the matter of faith is to be conducted, how in the matter of thankfulness, and how in what relates to his being in charity with all men, before he presume to eat of the sacramental bread and drink of the sacramental

cup, we have not time to consider now. May we have time and grace allowed us to do so, my brethren, with every other point of importance in this holy rite ; that, when the next occasion arrives for its celebration, we may come before the Lord our Saviour in such a state of preparation, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, as to receive the consecrated elements “ verily and indeed,” as pledges of our Saviour’s love, and as the most efficient means of spiritual health and strength and salvation, through his precious bloodshedding and sacrifice !

Apostle. In fact, the general rule in all matters of importance that related to the well-being of the Church was, that whatever the Apostles should "bind on earth should be bound in heaven, and whatsoever they loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven:" that is, whatever they, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, should appoint as a Christian rule, or dispense with as being no longer necessary under the Gospel, should be ratified on high; God himself would approve of it, and allow the act of his appointed servants to be his own.

Christianity being now firmly established in the world, and being allowed in the wisdom of its divine Founder to make its way in the hearts of men by the power of its own evidences, under the influence of his Spirit, it does not require any extraordinary or miraculous attestations of its truth, by the visible reward of the righteous or the punishment of the ungodly. "Doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth, verily there is a reward for the righteous." And some-

SERMON V

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

1 COR. xi. 28.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

A PART of the duty of self-examination, previous to a Christian's partaking in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, came under our consideration last Sunday; namely, that part which related to repentance, and the stedfast resolution to lead a new life. My object was to shew, that the whole life of a Christian ought to be one of repentance and faith, of continual increase in holiness, of progressive advance in every thing that is pure, and lovely, and of good

report; but that at the celebration of the Lord's Supper, an appeal being made to the soul in such a manner as to call forth all its highest powers of contrition, of faith, of thanksgiving, and to give an energy to all its best intentions, at that time more especially it was incumbent upon every man to see that he was not found wanting in those dispositions which the solemnity required. It is, to be sure, matter of daily humiliation and sorrow to a Christian, to think of his own numerous transgressions, of the many which he has been committing all his life long, and continues to commit; of the unlikeness between his own character, and that which is enjoined by the Gospel, and for the obtaining which the grace of God is freely offered him. But when the representation of the Lord's dying for sin is made in the feast of his own appointment; his body broken, his blood shed for us; who is there whose conscience will not, more deeply than upon any ordinary occasion, be pained with the thought, that it was for man's trans-

gressions that all this was done? Who is there, however he laments generally his own lamentable deficiencies in approaching near to "that mind which was in Christ Jesus," who will not be particularly struck with the conviction, that he has indeed come very far short of what was required of him, when the Sacrament so powerfully reminds him, that he ought to have made himself a sacrifice for others, as his Lord has been made a sacrifice for himself? It is a subject that uniformly employs the thoughts of all sincere Christians, how they may live each day better than they lived the day before. But who is there that can attend the feast, which his dying Lord instituted, without setting to work with better heart than he ever did before, from his being allowed such sensible tokens of that invigorating grace, by which indeed he is enabled to go on from strength to strength, and to love God and his neighbour more and more? Again, what is the ordinary life of a Christian, but a "walking by faith, and not by sight?" The moment

he forgets that he has no power of himself to help himself, and relaxes in his daily supplications at the throne of grace for new supplies of spiritual succour, he falls away from the degree to which he may have arrived. As soon as he keeps out of sight the truth, that his peace and happiness, both in this life and the life to come, are intimately connected with his belief in a crucified Redeemer, he becomes restless and unhappy in himself. There are times, perhaps, in his ordinary life, when he cannot bring before himself all those consolations which he stands in need of; but at the Lord's Supper, can there be any thing found wanting for so excellent a purpose? Will not the blessed words, should they at any other time fail in establishing that lively faith which is required in communicants, at least be allowed to have their full effect, when they are accompanied with such significant actions as accompany that rite? such words, I mean, as these; "I am the bread of life: he that cometh unto me shall never hunger,

and he that believeth on me shall never thirst....I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: the bread [too] which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world....Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in yourselves. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day; for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him^a." These passages, it is true, are not necessarily connected with the Sacrament, because their importance is to be felt at other times than when that Sacrament is solemnized; (the whole of a Christian's spiritual vitality and strength being in consequence of his habitually abiding in Christ, and deriving grace from him;) but still no one can help seeing how very apposite they become, when they

^a John vi.

are recommended to our notice by the interpretation given to them at the Sacrament, by the symbols of our Saviour's body broken, and of his blood shed for the sins of the world.

Again, in what frame of mind is a Christian required to walk more stedfastly than in the spirit of thankfulness? Yet it is no general sense of the universal goodness and greatness of his Creator, nor of his goodness to himself in particular, in making him the subject of his redeeming love, and of his sanctifying influences, that will keep up such a remembrance of his Lord's dying, as is befitting a devoted servant of Christ. The powers of gratitude cannot be strengthened as they ought, except by having constant recourse to those consecrated symbols of the divine goodness towards us, which are set forth at the Lord's table. And so, again, where can a man better learn, than at that same heavenly banquet, "to be in charity with all men?" Considerations arising from the study of the Gospel, with earnest prayer

and watchfulness, may have brought him to the belief, that he can never do too much, nor yet enough, for his neighbours : but the reason for his boundless charity is no where so strikingly enforced, as at the sacramental commemoration of Christ's death, whereby he is so forcibly instructed in the truth of St. Paul's words, that "if one died for all, then were all dead," dead in trespasses and sins; all therefore of a common, corrupt, and suffering nature, and all mutually beholden to each other for the interchange of kindness and support.

Inasmuch, then, as at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the appeal which is made to a Christian's repentance, faith, gratitude, and charity, requires, perhaps, a more than ordinary exercise of the soul in these several ways, it surely becomes our duty to see that we are disposed accordingly. "Let a man examine himself," therefore, as upon the point of repentance and amendment of life, so, "whether he have a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ."

This is a most important subject of enquiry, my brethren. Every thing connected with what is required of us to be believed as Christians is full of importance; but I will only now speak of the exercise of faith, as it is particularly called for in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Let a man seriously ask himself, then, some such questions as the following. What reason have I to expect that God will take me to happiness when I die? Upon what do I build my hope of everlasting life? Why do I expect my sins to be forgiven? If the answer to any of these or such like questions be given in confidence of a man's having done as he thinks no harm to any one, having lived a quiet respectable life, or having gone through much trial, and affliction, and pain; and if, in consequence of this or any thing else that a man has done or suffered, he looks upon himself as meriting the favour of God; or if he looks upon the blessedness of heaven merely as a change from the misery of earth, and to be enjoyed as a matter of course by

all that have ended their days laboriously or wretchedly; let him be assured that he is in a very fatal error. The entertainment of such notions as these, precludes entirely that essential part which is required in a man's self-examination in the matter of faith, namely, whether it be strong and lively in "God's mercy through Christ." Now if a man is entitled to a reward for his own works and deservings, why should there be any mention of mercy? It were an act of justice, not of mercy, to give a man what he deserved. But you see, the requisite for a man's preparation in the matters of faith, is only that he should have a quick and powerful sense of "God's mercy in Christ." This sense of his need of mercy can only rest upon the conviction, that if he were dealt with according to his deservings, he would meet with a very different treatment indeed. Then comes in the comfortable thought, in the midst of his self-condemnation for sins committed and duties left undone, that Christ died to purchase a pardon for peni-

tent sinners. That if a man be deeply sorry for the sins, and errors, and negligences, of his past life ; that if his determined purpose, through grace, is to live better for the future, and in this disposition of contrite grief, and self-condemnation, and anxiety to please God for the future, he casts himself upon the mercy of his Saviour ; he may confidently believe that it will be extended to him. Whoever encourages such a train of thought as this, will never presume to absent himself from the Lord's table, upon the plea that he is not worthy to go there : for who indeed is worthy ? Who is there to whom " God's mercy in Christ Jesus" is not the most delightful subject of contemplation, when we call to mind all his dealings towards us ? I do not say that the hardened, unrepenting, careless sinner is to be a communicant fresh from his sin, and profligacy, and irreverence, and without a wish to live better for the time to come : but this I may say, that whatever be the spiritual dulness, and whatever the moral depravity in other re-

spects, God in his "mercy, through Jesus Christ," will forgive it all, if with hearty repentance and true faith a man turn unto him. There is no excuse for a man's absenting himself, unless he is wilfully determined not to repent of his past life, nor to amend for the future ; there is no possibility of peace here, nor of happiness hereafter, to a man, who, through fear lest he should commit a sin in going to the Sacrament, determines to go on in his old courses, and dies as he has lived, in hardened indifference to his dying Lord's request.

The conclusion to which a man's self-enquiry, as to whether he has "a lively faith in God's mercy through Christ," will bring him, (if he makes the enquiry with a desire to please God,) will be, that it is his duty to close with the offer of mercy made to him in the Sacrament without delay. He will say, It is not for me to hope that this ordinance will be vouchsafed to me at any time that I please. Perhaps I may never be in the way of receiving it again ; perhaps I may be cut

off before I expected it; perhaps the thoughts which I have encouraged upon the subject may be all gone in a short time, and my soul returned to its former dull and listless state. While I can, therefore, I will do what my Lord hath commanded me. He is not, however, content with the mere performance of a duty from the conviction of his need of the mercy of Christ, but his gratitude is at the full. He is rejoiced, that, by the death of Christ, his own eternal death is prevented. His is a "thankful remembrance" of his Saviour's love, in laying down his life for him. He sees, in this great act of goodness, his own redemption from the eternal effects of sin; from hopeless misery; from irreclaimable woe; from the otherwise irreversible sentence of wrath: and, while he believes in his own interest in this great mercy, he cannot feel thankful enough that it has been vouchsafed to him. He sees, moreover, that, in virtue of his Saviour's death, spiritual power is communicated to every sincere penitent; power to live in the

fear and love of God ; power to hope, and be patient, and persevering unto the end : and this, among all the subjects of thankful remembrance which the institution awakens within him, is not the least.

There is one point more of preparatory self-examination, before a man partakes in the consecrated bread and wine at the Lord's table ; namely, whether " he be in charity with all men." Now for a Christian, at any time of his life, and under any circumstances, to live in ill-will and uncharitableness with his neighbours, is a direct contradiction of any, even of the slightest, pretences made towards obeying the Gospel. If a man be regular in attendance at his church, (which many are, who still do not frequent the Lord's table,) he cannot have been sincere in his public prayers, if he has left the house of God with an unkind or malicious intention against any one. No compliance with any external act of devotion, if it leave the heart unaffected, brings the formal worshipper any good ; but rather

increases his sin, because it puts the person in the condition of those, whose " hearts are far from God, while with their lips they honour him." And yet men will carry on a course of church-going year after year, being all the while in enmity with their neighbours, and flatter themselves that they are no worse for what they have done, while they are at once struck with terror, if invited to attend the Lord's Supper. Of course, let them not come to it, without resolving, by God's grace, to " love their neighbour as themselves ;" but let them not be so utterly unwise, as to think that any other of their devotional acts can be acceptable, while they continue to hate their neighbour. So long as a man lives in any state of unrepented sin, whatever it may be, whether he is a communicant or not, so long is he in a most dangerous condition. He has no reason to expect that his wilfulness will be overlooked, for he lives in defiance of better knowledge, and in contempt of means of grace, which God will not pass over lightly.

How long this work of self-examination is to go on, previous to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, must depend upon the state of the worshipper's heart. If, after partaking in the sacred elements, there be no good effect produced, but the same worldliness, and selfishness, and sensuality continue to be seen in a man's conversation as before ; then, however long or particular self-examination may have been, it has been all to no purpose ; while, on the other hand, if a practical result has arisen from it, the self-examination has been an acceptable one, however hastily performed. In this, as in every thing else of importance, whether in eternal or in temporal things, " he that soweth little shall reap also little, and he that soweth plentifully shall reap also plentifully." The least degree of sincerity of purpose, by the grace of God, if it lead to an improvement in the Christian life after communicating, will be graciously accepted ; but if a man can do much, let him be certain that God requires much from him. We

have many of us our time much at our own disposal ; seasons of quiet, and chambers for solitary retirement ; these have not been given to us for no purpose ; but, at this season of Lent especially, should be converted into places for secret and close communion with God and our own hearts. Others among us may be living in a crowd, without such advantages of private prayer and meditation, as are almost indispensable for the right preparation of the heart ; still let us do what we can, regarding God's will, which is, that we do our utmost by his grace. This may he graciously grant us his assistance to do, both now and all the days of our life ; that whenever we come before him to worship him, serve him, and obey him, he may pardon the sins and infirmities of our natures, and give us what he seeth needful for us, for the sake of his blessed Son, our Saviour and Redeemer.

SERMON VI.

ON THE LORD'S SUPPER.

JOHN vi. 35.

Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

THIS is one of those verses which I mentioned a short time since, as being not necessarily dependant upon the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for all its meaning, but which certainly becomes invested with peculiar signification, when connected with the celebration of that holy rite. The ordinary life of a Christian is a life of faith; the whole of his spiritual vitality and strength is the result of his habitually abiding in Christ, and Christ in him. "As the branch

cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me," are our Lord's own words : and they shew the necessary connection which must always subsist between the disciple and his Lord. But when, by an act of singular efficacy, for the purposes of holy living, a Christian is made more than ordinarily sensible of the necessity of his abiding in Christ, then the text becomes fraught with meaning which it had not before. "Faith almost kindles into sight," when at the table of the Lord we have set before us that which we touch, and taste, and handle, as emblematic of the heavenly doctrine of the Gospel, and of its power to strengthen and refresh the soul. At other times, indeed, whether we pray or meditate in a devotional frame of mind, or read the Scriptures, or converse with our friends on religious subjects, or listen to doctrines of an edifying nature, or whatever it may be that has a direct tendency to improve the heart, the good which, by the grace of God, we derive, is obtained

by the intervention of no visible emblem or token of grace : but at the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the satisfying of our souls is represented by things which are the subjects of our senses. In so gracious and condescending a manner has our Lord ordained that we should specially "remember" him, that we may almost say, he has vouchsafed to us hereby the evidences which he allowed St. Thomas ; for as he beheld the wounded hands of his Lord, and reached out his hand and thrust it into his side, so are these assurances given us in the Sacrament, which cannot but produce in us the most full and perfect conviction that he is the Saviour of our souls.

Connecting this text, therefore, with the celebration of that feast which he has commanded to be kept "till he come," we may conclude this series of Sermons with an exhortation to all who value the salvation which Christ has wrought for them, (and who look to him as its author and finisher,) to come for his life-giving and supporting

strength in the Sacrament of his appointment. "Come, for all things are now ready." Come, ye that have never yet remembered your Lord in the way which he has commanded, for he is ready to receive you, to accept your repentance, to quicken your faith, to enable you to serve him more acceptably for the days to come. Do you fear that you are not prepared sufficiently? That very fear is a proof that you do not wish to offend the Lord, but that you desire to be accepted in his sight. Do your best then, by his grace, and be assured that he will not despise "a broken and contrite heart," though deficient in many particulars which would make your preparation more perfect. Do you fear God's special wrath, if you should communicate unworthily? Alas! why not fear his special wrath, when you live unworthily without communicating? If there be any among you living in habitual sin, whether it be drunkenness, swearing, lying, slandering, idleness, hatred, and variance, or any other evil against which the wrath of

God is revealed, your condition is most dangerous, whether you communicate or not. If God should take you away from earth in the midst of your sinful practices, whatever they may be, if you have done them in defiance of better knowledge and continual exhortations to amend, and repented not of your iniquities, you know that you have nothing to expect but "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched." If he spare your lives, while you continue without repentance, you are living under his wrath and condemnation. The fear may be, with some of you, that you may be under greater condemnation if you communicate unworthily, than if you lived in sin without communicating; but this can be true only when men go to the Sacrament purposely to profane it; which it is scarcely conceivable many persons could do in these days; for, let their previous preparation be ever so incomplete, they must at least have entertained some desires, some expectations, that the service will be of use to them, and must

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and business and pleasures of life, for without his special grace to support you under your cares, they will overwhelm you ; without his aid, your farms, or your shops, or your family duties, will steal your affections away from God and religion ; without his controlling help, your days will be spent in thoughtless vanity, and in weariness to the soul and body. Why delay for an hour to set yourselves in sincerity to seek the Lord, seeing that life and health are all uncertain ; that a fever or an accident may deprive you of your existence, or paralyse all the powers of your minds and bodies ? Why procrastinate, when the consequences of doing so are so awfully fatal ?

I will not dwell, however, upon the terrible punishment of those who refuse to take advantage of the means of grace offered by the Church, except in repeating the Wiseman's words to all that resolve to harden their hearts ; " Because I have called, and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; but ye have set at nought

all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh. When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof: therefore they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices^a."

I will now shew, from the words of the text, what the reward shall be of those that set their Lord's will before them, and endeavour to follow it in every thing. "He that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." Now "he that cometh unto God," as the Scripture says, "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that

^a Prov. i. 24—31.

diligently seek him." He therefore that cometh, believeth ; so that we may at once say of the true believer, (who is the person that goes to Christ, and takes him as the sacrifice for his sins, and also for an example of holy life,) that he shall never hunger nor thirst. This is the complete satisfaction which he shall obtain ; this is the great reward of which he will be put in possession. In our natural appetites, there can be nothing more distressing than to have a strong desire to eat or to drink, and to be able to get nothing wherewith to satisfy either hunger or thirst. The craving of these appetites becomes insupportable at last, (as those have told us whose misfortune it has been to have been so circumstanced,) and if no relief is to be had, death inevitably follows. These appetites are given us, indeed, to teach us, as their name implies, to seek our proper sustenance ; they are means to an end ; and though it has pleased God to allow pleasure to attend upon the moderate gratification of them, yet

to have satisfied them is a better state than to be desirous of satisfying them ; it is better to be full, than to be hungry and thirsty. Now, as the perishing food of this life satisfies the body, calms its appetites, and puts it in complete possession of that in which it is its true nature to find satisfaction, so does the spiritual food pertaining to the life to come, to the new man, satisfy the longings of the soul ; and, when received as its nature requires, gives it possession of that rest and comfort, in which it completely acquiesces, seeking for nothing more, but perfectly contented in calm and tranquil enjoyment of that state, which it feels to be every thing it wanted. It hungers no more, it thirsts no more ; it is a state, that is, of entire satisfaction with the good things of which it has been made partaker ; there is nothing which it has not, that conduces to its well being. And is not this the state of that soul, that has found Jesus Christ to be his Saviour ? Is not this the state of happiness in which he is, that

has laid aside every thought, and purpose, and practice, which could not satisfy his immortal soul, and who has closed with the offers of mercy made by his Saviour, in whatever manner they have been made, that is, by whatever command, by whatever sacrament ? Until, indeed, the satisfaction is felt which arises from Christ's having been found to be the true object on whom the soul can repose itself, there will be a perpetual longing after some thing or another, which, if obtained, will be found unable to give the peace and happiness required. It may be, the thing sought for as likely to confer happiness is the desire to please God, and to do his will of ourselves ; it may be, the expectation to be made partaker of the happiness of heaven through our own merits, or, at least, partly so ; it may be, the denial of our original and actual state of sin. Whatever it be, wherein the soul reposes itself, short of that which the great and glorious nature which God has imparted to it requires, will be found at last (when it be-

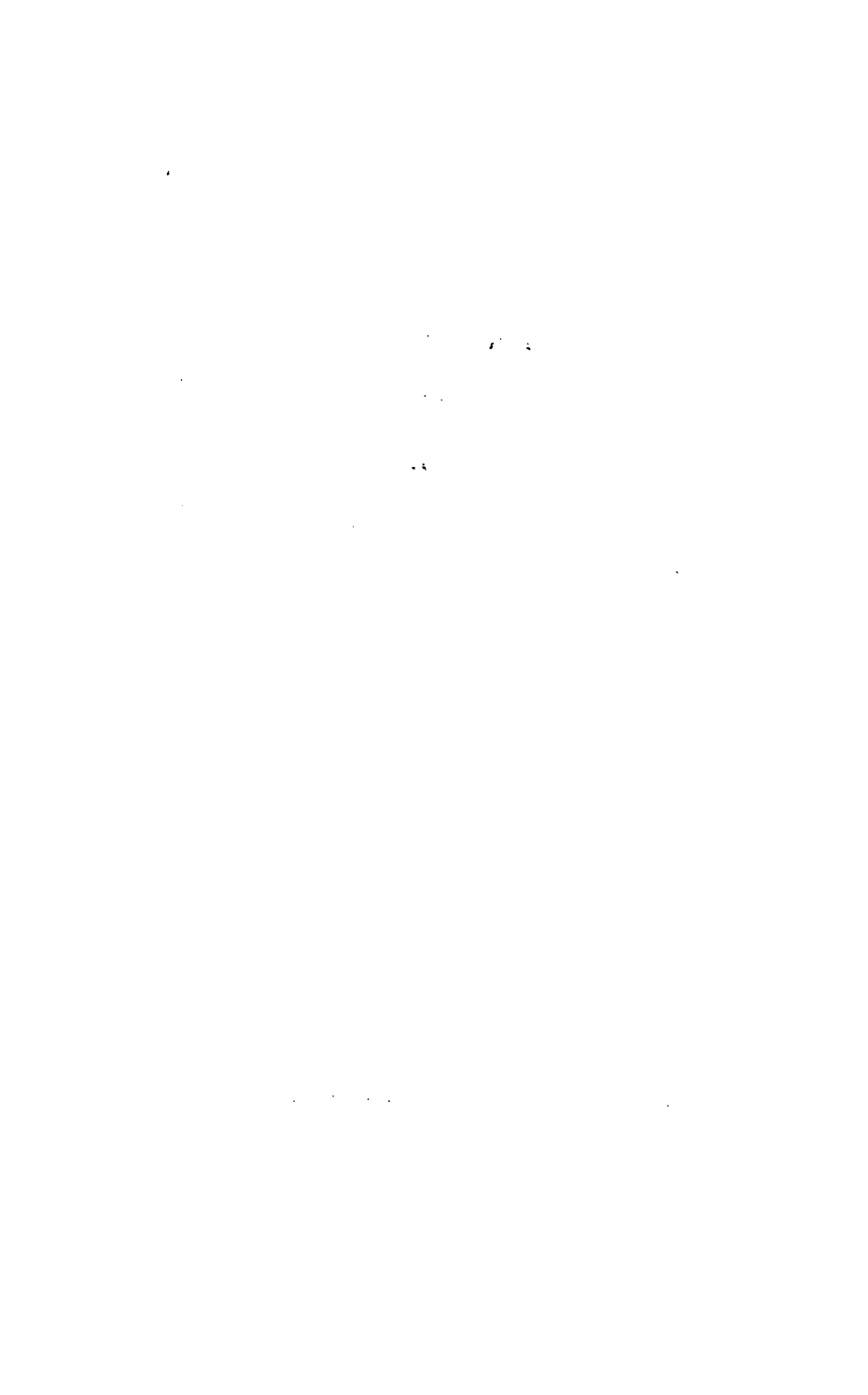
comes truly alive to its own spiritual interests) to have been a vain and weak support. Jesus Christ, and he crucified, and received as he is revealed unto us in the Gospel, as wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, is the only foundation that is completely able to support us.

It is worth while to try the experiment at least, if we know, to our sore uneasiness, that, whenever we have sought to find complete satisfaction in any but the true notion of evangelical sanctification and justification, we have been disappointed. And not for this world's sake alone is it worth while, but for the sake of that which is to come, much more. It is a glorious achievement, if, by any exercise of the soul upon subjects connected indisputably with eternal life, it can procure for itself peace and happiness, to a certain degree, in such a fluctuating and restless state of things as this world presents; where nothing continues in one stay, but where changes are perpetually taking place,

to the great detriment of our personal comfort, wounding our sensibilities, shocking our feelings, and wearying us full often with the burden of life : but when this very same process is allowed to prepare the soul for an eternal state of things ; when such peace on earth, acquired in the true faith of the Gospel, is the necessary prelude, through the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, to the eternal glories of heaven ; what other thought, what other pursuit, (save how to procure this true rest for the soul,) is deserving the attention of a Christian ? Oh ! my brethren, where are our thoughts, where are our hearts, what are our pursuits, while day rapidly succeeds to day, and week to week, and months and years sweep over our heads ! Let it no longer be our sorrow and our shame that we are feeding upon husks, and pampering ourselves upon emptiness and vanity. Such follies cannot last long ; and if they satisfy for a moment, it is only because we are ignorant of what alone is substantial and real. May the Holy Spirit dispose our hearts this day to

seek their true rest and peace, to labour for that "which endureth unto everlasting life," and, in our patient search after it, most thankfully to use every help which the mercy of God our Saviour, in compassion to our manifold weaknesses, has vouchsafed to us: for those that come unto him in the way which he has appointed, he will in no wise cast out.

To Him, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the mysterious Trinity in Unity, be given all praise and thanksgiving and adoration, for ever and ever. Amen.



SERMON VII.

ADVENT SUNDAY.

LUKE xxi. 34.

And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

IN the preceding verses of this chapter, our blessed Lord has been giving an answer to his disciples, who had questioned him as to the meaning of a prophecy concerning the destruction of Jerusalem. A time should come, he told them, when not one stone should be left upon another of all that magnificent building, which was the glory of Jerusalem and of the world; when the Jewish people should be driven from their home and their country, and the followers of Christ

endangered in every dreadful way for their adherence to the faith. And so suddenly should the evil fall upon them, that scarce any warning should come of its immediate approach, although for some time before all kinds of tokens should have been given them, with a view to keep them aware of their danger, and prepared to meet it. These they were not to forget, but to keep their minds steadily fixed upon the promise of their Lord's deliverance in his own good time, however hopeless relief seemed to be. Not Jerusalem besieged by the enemy—not all the horrors that were about to take place within that city, that utter dereliction of all right and religious feeling, and that entire abandonment to the most revolting practices that were ever recorded by historians, but which, in less degrees, have not unfrequently taken place in the records of other cities and states, under circumstances of a somewhat similar nature—not any of these, or other terrors, were to interfere with the rightful exercise of the disciples' patience, and hope,

and perseverance, in all that their Lord had commanded. His promises and assurances of deliverance were to have their full effect upon their hearts; for as sure as that Christianity was true, so sure would the defence of its great Founder be vouchsafed to his disciples in their trouble.

Now it is very frequently the case, that prophecies which have a specific reference to some event soon to happen, look forward to other events of importance to the Church, and to every individual of that Church. Thus passages which contain words of hope or warning to the Jews, or to the early Christians, and which evidently had reference at first to their particular cases, become full of meaning to Christians of all ages, and can be legitimately adapted to ourselves. Thus the passage of Scripture before us is, in certain senses, as emphatical in its application to ourselves, as it ever could have been to that generation to whom our Lord first delivered it. And it addresses us with more than usual force at this time of the year,

when the service of our Church is bringing forward to our meditation all those scriptural subjects which relate to Christ's second coming. It is as if we heard our blessed Lord himself say to every one of us, Ye know not the day nor the hour of your own death; youth is no security against it; health is no defence against it; childhood as well as old age is liable to it. The rich and the poor, the favourites of fortune and the children of want and sorrow, are all standing, as it were, on the edge of a precipice, in complete ignorance how soon it may be God's will that they should take that step which shall remove them for ever from this life, and fix their condition everlastingly. "The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night." When all, we think, is secure, all peace and safety, then on a sudden our treasure is gone, our house broken through, and destruction brought upon us in all its terrors. It may be a fever that the Lord shall allow to do its work. How know we that it may not attack others around us, as it has already

done; those that were furnishing to themselves, perhaps, many long days of worldly expectation; and how can we presume to say, that we may escape the worst, and return again to our former state! Or it may be an accident that shall hurry us out of life, with all our sins upon our heads; or else depriving us hopelessly of the power of thinking and repenting of our sins, while we live on, a burden to society, and miserable in ourselves. There have been those who went forth to work and labour in the morning, who have become lifeless corpses at noontide, or evening. There have been those who laid them down to sleep at night, and never opened their eyes again in this world. Some have been surprised by death at their meals; some in the midst of their entanglements of business. Some have been summoned away in the heat of their amusements and pastime. There have been those who have adorned themselves for a feast or for a wedding, and whose mirth and gaiety has been the silence

of death before the day declined : ashes for beauty, the spirit of heaviness for the garment of praise, weeping for joy, have come where they were never expected ; where never a thought even of their existence was allowed to intrude itself. So sudden has that awful visitation been, which put an end for ever to all the pleasures and pains of human life. So little reason have any to “ boast themselves of the morrow, seeing that they know not what a day may bring forth ;” so true is it, “ that in the midst of life we are in death ;” so vain, so empty, so fleeting, so momentary have been found some of the most anxious and most natural wishes and pursuits of life.

Such they have been found, such is their character now, and such it ever will be. Is there no remedy for this state of things ? Have we nothing to do but to wait patiently till our time be come, and then to go at once ? We cannot prevent life from being less uncertain, we cannot prevent death from coming at the last, it is true ; but we

can do that which will come to the same thing; that is, we can habitually keep ourselves in a state of preparation, so as to prevent him taking us by surprise. By a proper degree of worldly prudence, we may have our temporal concerns in such a state, or in such advancement towards a proper arrangement, as that, if we die before we expected, we may not leave to those that come after us unnecessary cause for regret. If this is the way in which we have managed, then, as far as relates to the things of this life, death, whenever it comes, will not find us unprepared. But, "what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" What is he profited, if every worldly tittle be satisfactorily provided for, but the state of his soul uncared for? Is it not then a matter of much greater importance, that, in the uncertainty of life, a man should be in a Christian way prepared for death? If his heart be in a condition of impenitence, and his life be in opposition to the commandments of God, is it not of far greater consequence, that in this

respect he should be quite an altered man before he dies? Though it were wrong to leave the other undone, yet it is entirely wrong to leave the care of the soul till the latter day, as in this case the consequences last to all eternity.

Let us consider, then, what those causes are that interfere with men's care of their souls, and prevent them from being in a state of preparation for death. There is great reason to believe, that these causes are very active, and very prevalent; and perhaps some of us here present may not be quite aware, that even our own hearts may be more under their influence than we thought. In the words of our text, they are mentioned to be "surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life;" and we are bid to "take heed lest our hearts be overcharged" or weighed down therewith. Now, not to speak so much concerning decided habits of intemperance and indulgence, which it is clear to every one must incapacitate a man from any train of serious thought, and

render him most unfit not merely to die, but even to live in this world, in the proper station in which God put him ; is it in the power of us all honestly to say, that we are not letting the things of this life have too much of our affections and of our time ? Although we are clear from those degrading and brutalizing vices, which some unhappy persons are in the habit of committing, let us stop a little, and examine ourselves whether our hearts are as deeply set upon the certainty of death and the life to come as they ought to be. If we are unprepared to die, and to meet the Lord, it matters very little what it is that has caused this absence of Christian dispositions. If, when our last hour be come, it takes us unawares, it is of very little moment what the particular subject is on which our thoughts may have been engaged, what kind of careless and sinful life we may have been previously leading.

Thus then, upon the subject of temperance, we may have been better taught, and

have more regard for our souls and for our reputation, than to indulge to excess: but are we all quite clear from some of those sins which stand more or less under the head of "surfeiting and drunkenness," quite unshackled by the cares of life? St. Paul exhorts us, "whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the glory of God." How can he be said to have any respect to the glory of God, who lays no restraint upon his appetite, but indulges to such a degree, as to affect his bodily health, and indispose his mind for its proper exercise? And is this any unusual thing, any thing uncommon? is it not frequently done? and are not the opportunities for so doing within the reach of a great many of us? and are not the usual habits of society inclining to excess in food? and is there not danger, when evil customs are established, of our being led away by them? I am not quite sure whether persons in general lay this point to heart as much as thoughtful Christians ought. One thing seems to prove

this particularly, namely, the little regard in which the practice of fasting is held. I do not mean to say, nor is there the least reason to suppose, that the practice is neglected by all: there are good Christians, at all times, who in the midst of an evil and adulterous generation shine like lights in the world; who fast and pray for the mortification of their passions, and the improvement of their hearts; but, generally speaking, the duty of temperance and abstinence, with a view to preparing the soul for holy devotional exercises, and for getting an ascendancy over the desires of the flesh, does not, as far as we can tell, appear to be practised, nor is it usual to hear as much said about it, either in public or in private, as the case seems to require. On the contrary, in these days, some degree of singularity is not unfrequently attached to that self-denying practice, on which the Scriptures are very explicit, and which our forefathers practised as the Church still prescribes. How much this good practice may have been abused,

is nothing to the point ; there is no necessity of going from one extreme to the other ; and because some may have done it superstitiously, that therefore some others will not do it rightly. In reason, in nature, in religion, it must do good, were it only that it strengthened within us a habit of self-denial, and rendered the rational and spiritual faculties more acute. Let us consider then our Lord's warning in all its bearings, and not conceive that we are rightly preparing ourselves in a Christian way, when, in the absence of open violations of temperance and soberness, we are still guilty of " pampering the body," and making full " provision for the flesh."

There is danger then, from this quarter, that the day, which is to remove us for ever from this world, be less seriously thought of than becomes Christ's disciples : and the more so, because the evil is likely to steal upon us imperceptibly, through the prevalence of established custom. Well, therefore, did our Saviour warn us to take heed

lest we fall into the snare which Satan lays for us, because so subtle is its approach, that it requires the strictest watchfulness to guard against it. And, if this be true of the things which relate to the gratification of the appetites, much more is it true of that "lust of other things," that carefulness and trouble about the concerns of life, which come upon us all, more or less. "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you," were the words addressed by him to the multitudes, whose care was for their bodies, and not for their souls. How entirely are the same words calculated to repress in us those over anxieties for worldly advancement, those fretful cares and anticipations about the future, those fond and foolish schemes which we are for ever making, as if time, and success, and Providence itself, were all within our control! When we are adding field to field and house to house, when

we are straining every nerve to advance our interests, and strengthen our connections, when we are spending our days and nights in the pursuit of that which in the end satisfieth not the soul, how un-
 earthly is the lesson that these words instil into our hearts ! What will all these things profit you, they seem to say, when you are lying on your death-bed, with the conviction, indeed, that in some respects you have lost no time, and let slip no opportunity, but that in others your labour has been all in vain ? Your attention has been given to the cares of this life, and you have your reward. How much more happy would you be now, if you had sought for that honour and that praise which cometh from God alone ! And thus, in various ways, we may hear the appeal of the same warning address ; when sorrow has stolen in upon us, and our eyes are dim, that we will not look onward to the bright gleams of consolation which the Gospel affords ; when business presses

upon us, and would fain rob us of our set times for devotion; when the fears, and crosses, and anxieties of increasing years, call upon our necessary attention.

It is the Holy Spirit, my brethren, working upon our hearts, that can call away our affections and our thoughts from this low world, and fix them above. He alone can enable us to think of this life in its true character, namely, as a place of trial and preparation, a changing and a fleeting scene; and of the life to come, as an eternal rest, or continuing abode of joys unspeakable, and full of glory. By prayer, and watchfulness, and the blessed means of grace, which the Church affords, he enables us to weigh the claims which this life and the next make upon our hearts, and so to follow our worldly calling, as not to forfeit our hopes of heaven. God grant us all so to live, that death may not take us off without a well-founded hope of happiness, not in our own merits, not in the perfectness of our faith, nor of our repentance, but in the mercy of God, through

- his only-begotten Son, our Saviour and Redeemer.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all honour, praise, and glory, this day, and for evermore. Amen.

SERMON VIII.

PROVERBS xxiii. 21.

*The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty,
and drowsiness shall cover a man with rags.*

ALTHOUGH it is most true, that whenever the doctrines of the Gospel have found their way into the hearts of men, they will shew themselves influenced by their belief in all the actions of their life; yet, were we to wait till the heart was in this state, and to refrain from urging the necessity of keeping up the external decencies of moral conduct, as if it were beginning at the wrong point, there would be many who would be never the better for all our exhortations. For the case with a large number of persons, who profess the faith of Christ, that is, who call

themselves Christians, and who at times, indeed, appear to have a few ideas upon the subject of their religion, is, that upon the whole they are in a most wretched state of ignorance and insensibility as to the truths on which their hearts should be set. The true faith which, in its necessary operation, would lead them to mortify the deeds of the body, they have not received into their hearts ; it is foolishness unto them ; it is a matter beyond them ; consequently they are not alive to the various ways in which it ought properly to shew its efficacy in them. Now, is it right to wait till they do thus become alive to all the moral demands which their faith makes upon them, or in cases which are intelligible to them, to set before them at once the deformity of sin ? If by any means there is a chance of deterring them from the commission of those degrading vices, which ought not "even to be named amongst them," must we not endeavour to do so, even though we would gladly dissuade them from their ini-

quities, by first preaching the true doctrines concerning faith, and then waiting till these should work their proper effect? Why, surely, if in a Christian community there are some no better principled than heathens, no more possessed of true notions of duty than they were, it is a good plan to address them in such language as heathens at least would understand. To paint vice in its most odious colours; to hold it up to the abhorrence of all well-disposed persons; to shew the miserable consequences it brings with it in this world, and to point out the certain endless woes which follows it in the next: to do this, and by any means to arrest the attention of men, who otherwise would not listen to what was said, would be the kindest work of mercy to their souls.

Thus, with reference to the vices spoken of in the text, it seems as if, with a certain class of persons, it would be more useful to expose them in all their heinousness, than to begin by instilling true doctrine, which would eventually lead to right practice. The diffi-

culty is to arrest the attention of such persons: so little have they been in the habit of exercising their thoughts upon the subject of religion, that words illustrative even of the first Christian doctrines are but little comprehended by them. If, then, we can induce them, by any other mode of appealing to their fears or their hopes, to think about the danger of their sinful courses, and to leave them off, we are doing them the greatest of benefits. Thus, I proceed to shew the enormity of the sin of drunkenness, and, if time permits, the enormity of the other sins mentioned in the text; not saying so much as I otherwise should upon right doctrine, which leads to right practice, but setting forth these vices in all their fearful characters, if, by any means, a proper aversion to them may be inspired in the hearts of those who may require it. “The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags.”

I do not ask whether there are any here present who have been, or are, addicted to

this degrading habit: that it is, however, prevalent among us, and that by some persons it is not regarded with that horror which it deserves, are truths which I fear we must all allow. Both the habit, and the opinions respecting it, must be shewn to be totally unbecoming those who bear the name of Christians, and the matter must be set in its true light, that, by God's assistance, the sinful practice, and the false notions that prevail about it, may be removed.

First, with regard to the habit itself. What then has every Christian professed to do, as he hopes to be saved? His solemn declaration at baptism was, that he would forsake the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. Then he declared, that he would begin an uncompromising war against the evil temptations to which his corrupt nature exposes him, and that he would carry it on till the day of his death. He is not to say, These passions and inclinations are strong within me, and

therefore I do no harm in following them; but he is to remember, that the passions within him have all a tendency to excess, so that they must be wrong when they are followed immoderately. And they are followed immoderately, whenever they lead a man to forget that he is a spiritual being, not less than one of flesh and blood; whenever they lead him to any action which is in any way injurious to his proper well being, or offensive to society. Now in what manner can he who offends by drunkenness, be said in any way to have adhered to those solemn words of promise which he made when he was christened; which he has virtually made every time he has come to church; which he has ratified at his confirmation? In what manner can he be said to shew, that he has any correct notions of his being possessed with an immortal soul? How can he be said to give any proof, either of his knowing what kind of life God requires of him, or his neighbour has a right to expect? God Almighty made him a living soul. He put

him into this world, that he might think about God, and prepare himself for heaven, in the faithful discharge of his duties towards God and man. But in what single instance does he give any sign, that he knows for what purpose he was made, or what his duties are?

With regard to himself, he shews an utter ignorance of the true reason of his being placed here. The command of God is, that he "mortify the deeds of the body," that is, resist the evil suggestions of his nature so continually, as to kill their headstrong power. But he makes himself lower than the brute beasts that perish; because, when he falls into his abominable vice, he stupifies within himself a greater light of reason and intellect than they possess. Here he has been placed to fight against the works of the flesh, one of which is "drunkenness;" to "make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof;" but he makes an agreement with the enemy of his soul, and pampers the principles which ought to be checked,

and, as far as possible, rooted out. Here he is placed to be a thoughtful, attentive, industrious being; but in his melancholy adherence to his vice, he drowns all reflection within him; thinks not of his soul; thinks not of death; thinks not of the awful God, whom he is offending every day and hour of his life; thinks not of hell and its everlasting torments. He casts behind his back the advice and entreaties of friends; neglects his business; ruins his health, his reputation, his powers of applying himself to any honest and useful calling; brings poverty and disgrace upon himself, and perhaps leaves the world to go to that place, where there is no repentance, with all his aggravated sins upon his head. And while he is in this world, in what a melancholy state of stupid inactivity does he spend his days! The effects of his intemperance still remain, and betray themselves in his dull and vacant gaze, his indolent and idle manner. Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds with-

out cause? who hath redness of eyes? He that spends his time "in rioting and drunkenness." Into what difficulties does he not bring himself, which no prudence in after-times may ever enable him to get through. But what is the misery of this world, to that which is to come! How different a being is he in this life, from what a Christian ought to be! What an awful difference between him, and that character which he ought to shew himself; of watchfulness, of self-restraint, of "fulness of the Spirit, speaking to himself in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs!" And when he goes hence to be no more seen, of how sore punishment will he be thought worthy, "who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the Spirit of grace!" "Be not deceived," says the inspired apostle; "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor ex-

tortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

O that they were wise, and understood these things, and considered their latter end!

The habit of drunkenness, then, implies a man's total neglect of the duty which he owes to himself. And if it does this, he must neglect the duties which he owes to others. A man cannot do himself harm, without hurting his neighbours. He is a member of society, and society has demands upon him which he cannot possibly answer, if, by any misconduct of his own, he brings himself into a state of incapacity. Besides the violation of every rule of good conduct and decency which the drunkard commits, besides the disgrace which he brings upon himself from having exposed himself to the eyes and remarks of the right feeling and right thinking part of the community, he has no right to insult those feelings, and break those established rules of orderly conduct, which contribute mainly to the well-being of a community. In another way he

also neglects the duties which he owes to his neighbour. He cannot do his work with alacrity either of mind or of body. He receives, it may be, the full reward of his hire, but he is an unworthy labourer, because he has not done half-a-quarter as much as it was his duty to do. That which by temperance and soberness can be done in an hour, is by him not done in a day ; so that he is cheating his employer, while he is ruining himself, both in soul and body. Neglecting thus the duties which he owes to himself and to his neighbour, in every particular of his conduct, he proves that he is unconcerned about his duty to God. The best proof that we can give, indeed the only proper proof that we can give, of our doing our duty to God, being the punctuality with which we keep ourselves from all evil, and love our neighbour as ourselves.

It is not, however, the practice of this sin that alone requires to be condemned, but the opinions that are sometimes found to prevail upon it. There are many who would abhor

the idea of excessive drinking, many that are habitually temperate themselves, yet who have not such a detestation of intemperance in others as proves that they hold the vice in its proper condemnation. What then? is it so common among us, that, through the very frequency of its commission, its hateful character is forgotten? Has the sin become less an object of aversion? Is the drunkard to be thought better of now than he ever was before? Can we then forget those terrible words, which declare what the end of the drunkard shall be? or presume to explain away the plain language of Scripture, by alleging the strength of temptations to which men are now-a-days subjected, or the facilities with which they can procure the means of intoxication? The Gospel is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and the sin of drunkenness (which, inspiration tells us, if unrepented of, shall exclude a man for ever from the kingdom of heaven) is as hateful in the sight of God now as it ever was. If we are any of us so hardy as

to think less of its heinousness for any reasons whatever, yet we must not shut out the light of Scripture from our eyes, and presume to call evil by any other than by an evil name. In point of fact, the drunkard is scarcely a more respectable character than the thief, or even the murderer. It is true, the laws of the land are more severe against these; but "to the law, and the testimony;" what saith the Scripture upon the subject? The sin against which I am speaking is classed with theft and with murder, by St. Paul, as being one of those which shall shut a man out of heaven for ever, unless he repents and believes as a Christian before he dies. Now it matters not what sin it is that excludes him, if at the last he be shut out for ever from the presence of God, whether it be the sin of drunkenness, or any other that is visited with the severest penalty that the law of the land can inflict. Whatever opinion there may be held upon the matter, let us never forget the words of him who hath written holy Scripture for our

learning, and hold the vices which God has declared are an offence to him, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, in just condemnation.

There are two more transgressions of the laws of God and of nature made mention of in the text, which, if the time permitted, might be exposed in all their deformity equally with the vice of which I have spoken at length. They are common attendants upon drunkenness, it being generally the case, that he who indulges his appetites to excess in one way, has no disinclination to do so in another. Drowsiness, indeed, must be an attendant upon drunkenness; gluttony is so very frequently, but not necessarily so. Each of them are vices of the present day, and can neither be spoken against with too much severity, nor watched against with too much caution, in such an age as this, when the comforts and many of the luxuries of life are brought so within reach of the generality of persons, and wealth is so much diffused throughout the land. And

therefore let us not, through the abundance of the things which minister to our convenience and happiness upon earth, forget, that a temperate use of them is as incumbent upon us now as it ever was ; while the danger of abusing them is perhaps as great now as it ever was. Most of us might be more temperate than we are in food, in sleep, in apparel, perhaps in “ all things ;” and it is imperious upon every man’s conscience to decide for himself, in what particulars he may abridge himself of the things which he may have hitherto used freely, if he would serve God with a devoted spirit, and maintain his thoughts pure and lively, and render his body a good servant, and not a heavy burden to the soul.

But to return to the sin of which I have been speaking particularly. Though I have endeavoured to use all plainness of speech, and to declare what the Scripture says upon the subject, I must add a few words more, which shall be of advice, and perhaps of comfort, to the guilty, as what has hitherto

been said has been of disapprobation and reproof. Let those then who may have transgressed their duty to God, to their neighbour, and to themselves, by the habit of intoxication, and all whose notions upon the subject do not come up to the strictness of the Gospel, be entreated, the one to forsake the evil of their way, the other to learn truer notions of the sinfulness of sin, and of God's anger against it. Though they may not be intemperate themselves, let them fear the "woe to him that giveth his neighbour drink, and putteth his bottle to him, and maketh him drunken," and tremble lest the "cup of the Lord's right hand be turned to them." There are many instances of men who have been given to intemperance, and who have forsaken it. In this, as in every thing else, if there is a real wish to improve, there are ways and means to be discovered, whereby the wish may be crowned with success. May the Lord in his mercy be pleased to shew to all the error of their vicious course of life in such a manner, as shall lead

them to forsake it ! May they be induced, by any consideration which can arise from either this world or that which is to come, to leave off a sin so degrading, so humiliating, so inevitably destructive to their souls and bodies ! It is not too late to “ cease to do evil, and to learn to do well,” now : but it will be too late ere long. Perhaps this may be the last time that I may ever speak upon the subject, or some of you may ever hear about it. If so, let the words which have been spoken be retained in quarters where they are applicable, with the more thoughtfulness and the more zealous determination to carry them into effect without delay ! May God give us grace one and all to lay hold of the salvation which he offers us to-day, “ while it is called to-day,” through the merits and mediation of his only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

SERMON IX.

PROV. xxii. 6.

*Train up a child in the way he should go, and
when he is old he will not depart from it.*

THE Book of Proverbs is a very general favourite with all persons who are in the habit of reading their Bible occasionally. When I say it is a favourite book, I mean that, generally speaking, it is resorted to in preference to many other of the books of holy Scripture, as containing so many maxims of prudence and wisdom, and as being so clear to every common understanding. There we find plain directions as to the way in which God is to be loved, and feared, and served. There we see how we ought to live as members of a community, and as members one of another ; how we are to guide

ourselves and all with whom we have any close interest, or over whom we are called upon to exercise any degree of influence. For instruction, for reproof, for correction in righteousness, for comfort, for counsel, under all circumstances and in all situations, we may go to that inspired work, and we shall not search long before we discover the good precepts which we needed. It is true, indeed, we have the words of "one greater than Solomon" set before us in the Gospel, words of him that "spake never as man spake:" but are we indeed so spiritual in our discernment, as to be beyond all the benefit to be derived from the moral instruction which we meet with elsewhere? Are there not some Christians who are not yet acquainted with "the law of the Spirit of life," and who are therefore not yet in a state that admits of their being appealed to entirely upon Christian grounds? Are there not, that is, some persons, who know so very little about the faith which they profess, that they must be addressed as if they did not

understand, that true repentance and true holiness of life follow necessarily upon the right belief of the Gospel? Are there not some, whose attention requires to be awakened, almost for the first time, upon the subject of religion? who want to be told the very first principles of truths that relate to their souls, and to heaven and hell? who, consequently, are not prepared, by the divine morality and inspired wisdom of the Old Testament, to perceive the superior glory of the New? And if the case be thus, have we not to fear, nay, are we not certain, that the words which our Lord spoke to the Jews are, in many respects, applicable to the present times, namely, that "the queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn them, for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here?"

There cannot then be done a greater kindness to those who have not yet learned the

wisdom of Solomon, much less the wisdom of Jesus Christ, than to appeal to their hearts and understandings in such a manner, as, by the grace of God, shall lead them to think seriously upon any one branch of plain practical morality. Notwithstanding all our knowledge, and all the vast acquirements which the minds of men have been making in the various branches of science, which can interest them as immortal and rational beings, still the world gives but too many instances of neglect of the simplest, and what ought to be the commonest, duties. And what will avail all our speculations, my brethren, in divine or in human affairs, if, as a nation, as a parish, or as individuals, any of us shall be found wanting in the most obvious duties of life? What will it profit us to be great scholars, great divines, great statesmen, great in counsel, men of renown, if we fail in our plain every-day duties as Christ's disciples, as fathers, or husbands, or masters, as friends and neighbours? If at the last our hearts shall be found to have

been impure, or we shall be proved to have been neglectful rulers of our own houses, and insufficiently attentive to the lives and the manners of those whom nature and reason have given to our care, all the worldly reputation and praise which we may possess is without value.

The text sets before us, in language which he may read that runs, the necessity of teaching a child his duty betimes, in order that he may grow up under wholesome discipline, and serve God in his generation as long as he lives. It contains, we shall see, a great deal of matter; and, indeed, so many subjects are likely to arise for our consideration, all intimately connected with it, that I shall leave them for our consideration for future Sundays. At present, and as the first part to what is to be said upon the whole subject, let us endeavour clearly to understand what the Wise-man means, when he speaks of the "way in which a child should go." "Train up a child in the way he

should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

There is a way, then, in which every child should go; that is, there are things which every child ought to know, practices which he ought to be early taught, duties which he has to perform. It is very usual in the Scriptures for the Holy Spirit to teach us what our behaviour, our conduct, our mode of life in the world is to be, by mention of the way in which we should go or walk. So David says, "Blessed is the man that hath not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stood in the way of sinners:" "the way of the Lord is an undefiled way, converting the soul:" "he will teach sinners in the way." "There is a way," says Solomon, "which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death:" that is, there are practices which persons follow without fear or compunction, but which will end in their everlasting misery. So again, besides the numerous passages of

the Old Testament, the words of our blessed Lord are frequently spoken in the same figurative manner. "I am the way, the truth, and the life:" that is, it is Christ who teaches us what to believe, what to do; and it is through him alone that we are allowed in mercy to enter into eternal happiness. And every one here present can probably call to mind many passages of the same kind; so that "the way in which a child should go" must mean, it is clear to all, the manner in which he should be educated, what he ought to learn, and believe, and know, and do.

Now on this subject there are a multitude of opinions, and a vast number of systems are followed. I am neither going to trouble you with any thing like a recital of those opinions, nor of those systems, much less to attempt to settle which may be the best; because it would be rather deviating too much from what I want to say particularly. There is one thing perfectly clear, namely, that there is one way in which every child ought to go; there is one set of rules by

which he ought to be guided ; one sort of education, which it is incumbent upon all, who have any thing to do with him, to see that he gets : it is “ the way in which he should go.” The questions, then, may still be agitated as to the merits of this or that mode of education, so long as, in one point, all men are, as they ought to be, agreed ; namely, that there is one sort of instruction which all must have, and without which every other must be mainly and essentially deficient.

What then is this way, in which every child should go ? It is the way of holiness ; of duty to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost ; of piety towards him that is the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier of every heart that turns to him. It is the way of duty to man his neighbour, in every relation of life, as above him or below him, as connected with him by bonds of natural affection, or by such merely as entail upon him an interchange of reverential, courteous, or kindly offices, in consideration

of the authorized sanctions of human law, or the common ties of human nature. To all these was the child pledged in the most solemn manner at his baptism; and the very first prayer made in his behalf, after that holy ceremony, was, that he might "lead the rest of his life according to that beginning." What can be more clear, then, than that from the very earliest period of his life, as soon as ever he is capable of receiving instruction, every pains should be taken to impress his mind with a sense of what God and man require of him? After that solemn address which is made to parents or sponsors upon the baptism of their children—"Ye must remember that it is your parts and duties to see that the child, in whom you are interested, be taught, as soon as it is able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession he hath here made by you. Ye shall call upon him to learn . . . all things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health, and provide that he may be virtuously brought up to lead a godly and a

Christian life: "—after this solemn address, I say, how inexcusable are those who neglect to impress upon the minds of the young persons committed to their charge the great duties which God placed them upon earth to fulfil; or who refuse to let them attend when others are willing to teach for them, or who, by any mismanagement of their authority, weaken the hands of those who are thus engaged in their behalf! What anxious fears about their children ought we not to hear expressed, when the symptoms of that evil nature with which all are born, and which remains with all more or less through life, shew themselves in some untoward manner, in opposition to the authority which is exercised over them, or in defiance of it! And how promptly should the earliest signs of insubordination be checked, however painful correction and chastening might be, in order that they might, as speedily as possible, be brought back into the good way from which they had wandered! The task, my brethren, must be

done in infancy or in childhood, or it will never be done, in all probability. The evil principles of human nature must be withstood, and the implements of spiritual warfare which the young Christian must make use of, if he would ever prevail against the enemy and be victorious in the struggle, must be put into his hands as soon as possible. It is the tender shoot that is pliable, and admits of being bent and trained in the direction in which we wish. It is upon the wax that is soft and yielding that we make the impression which we desire. It is just the same with the understandings of children. We may be the instruments of moulding and fashioning them after the true pattern of excellence, so long as they remain tender, from having had as yet little intercourse with an evil world; and having done our best, with all patience and industry, we may hope, that the impression, and the germ of right knowledge and pure conduct, will remain till their latest breath. But if we wait till their susceptibility of improvement is

weakened, as it is the longer they remain uninstructed, the task of informing them becomes extremely difficult, and, if attempted in advanced life, is often entirely unattended with success.

I have taken it for granted, that all Christians, however they may differ in their opinions upon some points of education, are agreed upon one, that there is one way in which every child ought thus to be brought up. In pointing out, therefore, the necessity of their being put into and kept in this way, I have not brought forward those reasons, which are obvious to all that have ever given the subject any thought. I have said nothing on the great reason why it has pleased God Almighty to place us in this world, and but little on the greatness of the work which we have to do here upon earth, or of the uncertainty of the life which has been given us to do it in. All these, however, are considerations full of weight, and they have only not been dwelt upon at length, because it is scarcely conceivable that any one would

object to religious education, to which I have now been confining myself. For no man can, with any degree of consistency, object to it, without being prepared to allow, that the best thing for a Christian is to live like the beasts that perish, ignorant of God, ignorant of Jesus Christ the Saviour, ignorant of the Holy Ghost the Sanctifier. No one who does not think, that the best course for a Christian to pursue is to drown all thought within him except for the things of this world, to cast religion behind his back, and to go directly on in the broad way that leads to everlasting destruction. No one, I say, who is not senseless or wicked enough to think in this manner, ought ever, by any hint or word or action, to discountenance the teaching of children "in the way they should go."

Concluding, then, that the duty of teaching them their Christian duty is allowed by all, I will add a few more considerations on the present occasion, which may make us more zealous and patient in this great work.

It is allowed on all sides, that though they may be slow in learning what is good, they are not so in acquiring notions of evil, and in learning bad habits ; and in this age, they have many bad examples to contend with, and much erroneous principle to overcome. The low and degrading vices of drunkenness and gluttony, those of profane swearing, of neglect of the Lord's day, disobedience to authorities and the powers that be, and a general disinclination to the good ways and paths which have been sanctioned by antiquity, and are agreeable to Scripture, are crying evils of the present day. The difficulty, of course, is the greater, in proportion as our efforts to guide the young aright are thus likely to be counteracted by pernicious doctrines and pestilential examples ; but the greater need is there that we lose no time, and stint ourselves in no exertion to bring them on in the paths of holiness and righteousness. It is the Lord's work, let us all remember, that we undertake ; and if we do our parts in honesty and sincerity, not

trusting to our own strength, but committing our cause to him who can turn the hearts of men and of children even as he will, our labours will never be in vain in him. Let us to our task, then, under his guidance, and with a view to his glory; and while we pray for his blessing upon our well-directed and patient endeavours, let us not doubt the powerful efficacy of his grace to mortify and kill all vices in us, and so to strengthen us, that we, and all whom we can influence by our words and actions, may glorify him by the innocency of our lives, and the constancy of our faith unto death; for out of the mouths even of babes and sucklings hath he ordained strength, and made infants to glorify him by their deaths.

SERMON X.

PROV. xxii. 6.

*Train up a child in the way he should go, and
when he is old he will not depart from it.*

IN discoursing on these words last Sunday, I endeavoured to shew, that there was one way in which it was our duty to see that the rising generation is strictly trained. Whatever might be advanced in favour of this or that peculiar mode of instruction, (and there is none, perhaps, which has not some advantages, which in certain respects may make it more desirable than another,) it was not to my purpose to stop and enquire; confining myself, as I did, to the duty of religious instruction. To this kind it was taken for granted that none could possibly

object, whatever might be their wishes that their children should or should not learn besides ; for, in a Christian country, and before a Christian congregation, it seems as if it would be superfluous to bring reasons for a thing so plainly necessary. It is hardly possible to conceive, that any one (except the person who has hardened himself into a disbelief of every thing that is revealed, or who is so sensual as to have drowned all kind of reflection within him) should not wish the young to be early taught that they have souls to be saved ; that there is a way by which they may be saved, and a way by which they may be lost for ever ; that life is only a short time wherein to prepare for death and for judgment ; in a word, so universally is the maxim of the Wise-man allowed, that it would be taking up your time to little purpose to say why it should be acceded to.

Having then decided what the “ way ” is in which a child should be brought up, let us proceed to enquire what Solomon means

when he exhorts us to *train* him, and upon whom this duty of training him devolves.

Now the word *train*, as expressed in the margin of the Bible, and applied to the instruction of children, means to catechise, or to teach them the first principles of the knowledge which is necessary for them to learn. It implies difficulty, observation of character, watchfulness, patience, perseverance. It is difficult, we know, to train any thing exactly in the way we wish it to go. The branch of the tree which we are desirous should bear fruit, or grow in any particular direction, must be carefully handled at proper seasons, and in a skilful manner, or it will not turn either to beauty or to profit. The stream of water which is to be brought over our fields or gardens for irrigation, or guided in various channels for mechanical purposes, must be scientifically managed, that every part of the uneven soil may have its due portion of moisture and fertility; or it must be carefully kept within bounds, that it may properly affect the ma-

chinery called in to the aid of human toil and sorrow. But to go from inanimate to animate nature, we find at once a new field of difficulty, not however of insuperable difficulty, before us, when we would attempt the bringing under of any of the brute creation to serve our purposes. The apostle St. James tells us, "that every kind," or "nature," "of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed, of mankind." Animals, we know, of the most ferocious kinds, have been tamed; but with what patience and extraordinary methods is well known, or at least need not now be described. Others of the wildest and most timorous natures have been brought under human discipline; and at this day we are receiving hourly a great portion of our domestic, our social, and our general comfort, from the services which we derive from them. For food, for clothing, for comfort, for luxury, we are infinitely indebted to them, through God's kind and gracious providence, so

wonderfully has man reclaimed them from their wild and savage natures, and broken them into his service ; and so thankful should he be for the help and comfort which he receives from them. To instance but one or two particulars, in which we see the truth of the Apostle's words, and see the effects of training and discipline, who should imagine that that patient creature, so full of service, and yet so ill-treated in general, should be the descendant of that animal, whom Job describes in this beautiful language ; " Who hath sent out the wild ass free ? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass ? whose home I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing." Or again, when he speaks of the horse, with his " neck clothed with thunder who paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength who mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted :"

or when he speaks of the hawk "flying by wisdom, and stretching her wings towards the south;" giving us in a few touches the free and undisciplined characters of these creatures:—who, I say, would have conceived, that, in these instances so particularly, the dominion of man over the "living things that move upon the earth, and over the fowl of the air," should have been so completely established? The thing, however, has been, and is constantly done, however difficult it was to do, and however unlikely it might have appeared to those who did not know it, that any endeavours should have been crowned with success.

In our labours of love towards the souls of those whom God hath committed to our charge, we have a far more glorious work than any other upon which the patience and perseverance of man can be employed. We were saying, that the expression which Solomon uses, implies difficulty in the undertaking, observation of character, patience, and other qualities, in those who undertake

the work of Christian instruction. Yes, indeed, my brethren, we have difficult materials to work with, and those that have ever undertaken to reduce them to their proper state, have been sometimes well nigh wearied with their trial, which increases the difficulty of obtaining the end desired. Human nature is as far as possible gone from original righteousness; and every child born into the world is born in this nature, which is far more difficult to subdue than that of any living creature which yet we do know to have been brought to useful and laborious services. To mention St. James again. There is one part of that nature which, he says, has never been subdued. "The tongue," he proceeds, "is such among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature," (that is, every thing with which it comes in contact, or over which it has any influence,) "and it is set on fire of hell....the tongue no man can tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." And of course it will breathe its

poison, and spread its pestilential effects the more effectually in its sphere, the more we neglect to counteract its evil power when people are young. To train up a child, then, in the way he should go, is to teach him to keep this member especially in due subjection ; and not this alone, but to subdue or to check every thing within him that is corrupt and sinful. It is to teach him to believe, that God the Father made him, God the Son redeemed him, God the Holy Ghost sanctifieth him ; that he has been created for everlasting happiness, if he will take pains to do what God has commanded him ; but that if he disobeys God, he will be punished everlastingly. It is to teach him to love his neighbour as himself.

The first point to be attended to in this work of religious instruction, for we have considered the subject hitherto rather in a general manner, is to influence *their belief*. To whom do they naturally look for support, for comfort, and as the authors of all that they have and enjoy ? There can be no

doubt to whom, namely, to their parents. These, they know, if they ask for what they want, will give it them, if it be in their power ; “ they know how to give good gifts unto their children,” and will not if they ask bread give them a stone, or a serpent if they ask a fish. Such is not the conduct of earthly parents ; on the contrary, they are every thing to their children in infancy, and childhood especially ; without them, better had it been for the children that they had never been born, since to be exposed at that tender age to any thing like unkindness, or severity of treatment, would rapidly carry them off at once. Now what practice can be more natural, more beautiful, and more in consistence with the precepts of Scripture, than to teach them to believe, that there is one whom they cannot see, who yet loves them far better than father or mother, or sister or brother, or any earthly relation or friend ? One who gave himself for them, that they might be partakers of everlasting joy and happiness in heaven. One who is

willing to make their hearts pure and holy? As children, they are ready to believe what is told them, and it is from this unsuspecting confidence reposed by them in others, older than themselves, that we see the force and beauty of these expressions, whereby Christians are exhorted to "receive the kingdom of God as little children;" and are told, that unless they be "converted, and become like little children, they shall not enter into that kingdom." Hence it is, that at their tender life they are so accessible to vain and idle fears, which by thoughtless and foolish persons are sometimes raised in their minds: but all this proves the point, that they are then in a fit state to have right impressions made upon their hearts, as to the "things which are not seen, and which are eternal." And as the first step in religion is to believe, so we find that it is the first to which their hearts can be led by the most natural and obvious method, provided of course it be done with due reference to their weakness, and littleness of understanding as yet, and pro-

per regard be had, in this elementary religious education, to the mode and the times of instruction.

The other truths of religion most particularly concerning them as Christians, will follow naturally upon the first impression made upon their hearts. Taught to believe in God, they will listen to what is told them about him, and they will understand how it is their duty to fear him and to love him, as it is explained to them how he is their Creator, their Redeemer, their Sanctifier. They will learn to pray to him, to open their wants to him, to tell out their little sorrows to him, who has made the very beginning of life sorrowful, that from the beginning of our life we may learn to be thoughtful and heavenward in our affections. To the duties of piety, or those which contain the duties to God in particular, they will learn to add those of love to their neighbours. They will be led to consider all those around them, especially those with whom they are connected by blood, as the particular objects of

kind and affectionate duties. At first their duties are for the most part confined ; it is to the love of their parents, and to obedience to them, to kindness of behaviour to their brothers and sisters, to speaking the truth and openness of conduct, that their attention is to be called in the narrow circle of life, with which alone they are as yet familiar. And thus, step by step, by close observance of character, by good example, and judicious precept, the infancy of life may be moulded into the form most essential to the well-being of a rational and immortal creature.

They who have had the most experience in this early teaching, will be most ready to confess the difficulty they have found in making those right impressions which they desired. They will tell you, (that is, if their own hearts are set upon religion, and they long for nothing so much, as that their own souls and their children's souls should be saved,) they will tell you, that it is no easy task to train them as they ought to go.

Here is passion to be dealt with, there petulance and peevishness ; this one needs reproof, that one encouragement ; and in all, that there is a principle of evil within them, which needs the eye and the heart of a watchful and feeling parent or friend. But if, as is sometimes the case, the natural guardians of their children's temporal and spiritual welfare do not attend to their work of instruction, then indeed we find it but too true, that the work of teaching is extremely difficult. It is only by the strictest watchfulness and minutest attention that children can be brought up as Christians at home : when this interest and care are not shewn towards them, neither in the example of those older than themselves, or in the advice which they give, then we can expect nothing but evil. In such cases children cannot be trained up in the way they should go, but, on the contrary, must imbibe principles, and become familiar with practices, which, if persisted in, must ruin them everlastingly. Their

parents and guardians are, it is true, their natural instructors ; but if these neglect their bounden duty, and leave their charge's souls a prey to the evil of life which is fast coming upon them, what is to be done? Must those perish for whom Christ died? Must they be lost for lack of knowledge, because no one will teach them, no one careth for their souls? No! the Church has provided, that where those persons fail in their duties to their children, which God, and nature, and affection require of them, the souls of those little ones must not be sacrificed for their parents' or their guardians' neglect. Upon them, indeed, upon every principle of piety, of charity, of justice, of pity, of love, of kindness, devolves the task of moral and spiritual illumination, and upon them be the shame and the reproof, when they suffer their little ones to sit in darkness: but God forbid, that through their sinful indolence eternal misery should befall their babes and sucklings!

Contemplating, however, the possibility of

the failure of parental care and instruction, the Church has provided, that the children at least should be put in the way of learning what God and man require of them. It is the duty of sponsors to see that those, for whom they pledged themselves at baptism, are taught, as soon as they are able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession they have made at that holy sacrament. It is their part to make them listen to and understand spiritual instruction, "and chiefly to provide that they learn the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and all other things which Christians ought to know and believe to their souls' health:" to take care that, when properly prepared, "they be brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him." And upon the failure of their parents' instruction, no false fears about intrusion into domestic arrangements, no over scrupulous delicacy about giving offence, should deter them from a duty, to which they have solemnly bound themselves before God and the con-

gregation. And even when they may be satisfied that the parents or guardians are taking the labour off their hands, and that their own interference is not so needful, it would be no more than their duty to interest themselves about the spiritual state of their god-children. And thus it might be a blessed work of cooperation between them and the natural protectors of the children, to assist mutually in bringing them up in the way they should go.

That the minister should be able to supply the deficiencies which are caused by the neglect of the parents and friends, can hardly be expected. His duty it is, among other things, to be the “messenger, the watchman, and steward of the Lord; to teach and to premonish, to feed and provide for, the Lord’s family; to seek for Christ’s sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever.” “And if it should happen that the same Church, or any member

thereof, take any hurt or hindrance by reason of his negligence, he knows the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue. He must never therefore cease his labour, his care and diligence, until he has done all that lies in him, according to his bounden duty, to bring all that are committed to his charge unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left either for error in religion or for viciousness in life." With God's assistance, he may be able to do much towards so great and glorious an end as forwarding the salvation of men ; but let it never be imagined, that he is the only person to whose province it falls to spread abroad the glad tidings of the Gospel ; for the cause of Jesus Christ is one in which we all should unite with one heart and one endeavour. And this we may all do, by praying and watching patiently, that our own hearts may be impressed with a sense of our Christian duty, and by letting

the light of our example shine to the glory of God and the edification of our neighbours, and chiefly of those who are depending upon us for every kind of protection and instruction. Let us not then look one upon another, and ask, "who is sufficient for these things," but "lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees;" that we and our children may "walk before the Lord in the land of the living."

SERMON XI.

Prov. xxii. 6.

When he is old he will not depart from it.

UPON two previous occasions, I endeavoured, from the former part of this verse, to shew, what the way was in which a child should be trained to go, the difficulties to be encountered in the work of religious education, and how urgent the duty upon all to do their part, that the rising generation be brought up in the knowledge and practice of their duty to God and man. I now proceed to the concluding part of this subject, and propose to consider, from the words of the text, the lasting benefits which are to arise to the individuals especially who are the subjects of our immediate anxiety ; but not

to them alone, but to all those who are in any way connected with them, from the work of Christian education having been properly done. The good effects of such teaching will not be seen merely in infancy and in childhood, but will accompany the increase of years ; and as one stage of life succeeds to another, and maturity and old age advance, the most important consequences will arise. Christian principles, Christian feelings, will increase and flourish; the heart of the instructed will become wiser in spiritual knowledge, and his conversation in life will redound more and more to the glory of God, and the good of his fellow-creatures. There will be " a going on towards perfection," a continual advance made in the mortification of every evil thought, and wicked or idle practice. Every year will bring an increase of knowledge of the Scriptures, and a more beautiful exemplification of this doctrine in all the deeds of piety and charity. The genuine fruits of faith will be seen in the tractability and

teachableness of childhood, in the diffidence, the self-distrust of boyhood, in a disinclination to display, in humility of thought and conduct, in readiness to submit, in quietness and patience under control, in resistance to the strength of passion, and to the growing ascendancies of human nature. They will shew themselves in the fearless love of truth, and in the abhorrence of all evil habits in more mature years. They will be seen in operation in the domestic circles of life, when the head of the family is Christianly alive to all that is required and expected from him, the promoter of every kind and benevolent occupation of a family, the refreshing, the strengthening power of all around him; the pattern of Christian integrity as a husband, a father, a friend, a brother, a neighbour. They will prove their blessed effects upon the heart and life, when years are heaped upon years, when changes and sorrows have come over a man's household, and some have left their home for the toilsome duties of life, and some have gone

away for ever in this world; when the freshness and bloom of youthful feelings is on the wane, and the withering touch of mutability is but too plainly traced; when all is passing away except death and eternity; when pain and sickness are at hand; when the eyes are getting dim, the pulse failing, the breath departing; till the few and evil days of human life are terminated, and the spirit returns to God who gave it; till the last hour of life will the fruits of faith and hope and charity be reaped by him, whose infancy was imbrued with Christian principles, and in whose heart the grace of God's Holy Spirit has been working.

Who would not desire for himself, and for every one in whom he was at all interested, that the abiding power of the Holy Spirit, thus sweetening the bitterness of life and sustaining its weakness, should be fully experienced both in his own and in their cases? The elder part of my hearers, who have not found Christian thoughts keeping them up in their hour of trial, if there be

any such here, must be anxious, from the recollections of their own unhappiness when the trial came, that the comfort and stay of religion should be known by others. They cannot wish their children, their friends, to be as unhappy as they themselves remember to have been, or perhaps continue to be. They cannot desire that their little ones should be, as they, perhaps, may have felt or still feel themselves, the prey of envious and discontented thoughts, the sport of temptations, the careful and troubled about many things, the restless upon earth, the unsteady in their affections towards heaven. No, they will spare no pains and no money, that all whom they love be put into the way which will lead them to peace here, and to happiness hereafter. They will fear, lest the world which has had its way so much with themselves, have the same ill effect upon their little ones especially. Theirs will not be merely a sending them to an instructor, and then thinking that the work is done ; but it will be an anxious parental

or friendly watchfulness over them, united with earnest prayer to God, that the discipline under which they are training may be of the most wholesome nature.

Nor will they be deterred from their anxieties by any unfounded fears, that the labours undertaken in their children's behalf may be unprofitable. Of course there is a chance, after children have been taught their Christian duties, after all the kind attention of natural and spiritual parents and teachers, there is a chance, I say, of their turning out ill. But if there is a moral certainty of their turning out ill without Christian education ; if the unchecked desires of human nature, aided by all the external temptations by which it is assailed, must shew themselves in every thing that is offensive to God and injurious to man ; and if the end of such a course unrepented of must be everlasting death ; we should use our utmost exertions to prevent such dreadful consequences. In some few cases we may, perhaps, fail ; but in the majority we are

almost sure to succeed, under the blessing of the Holy Spirit. At any rate, that person would act in the most senseless way, who refused instruction to his children, because sometimes it has been found to fail. Nothing but barrenness and waste must cover the soil, where no good seed has been sown; on the other hand, the certainty is, that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap:" he, indeed, would act most senselessly, who, through fear that his crop will not be so plentiful as he could wish, should neglect to cultivate his fields.

But as a single failure would, to a certain extent, go to invalidate the Wise-man's words, "when he is old he will not depart from it," let us consider what may be the causes of any one's turning out ill after he has been taught well. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Let the truth of our text stand forth in all its brightness, though the whole world gainsay it. Let it be maintained, on the one hand, that the child has been trained up in the way he should go,

and yet notwithstanding that he has departed from it; and, on the other and on the truer side of the question, that it is impossible he should depart from it; and we shall find, that the Wise-man's saying in the text bears upon it the impress of the Divine veracity.

How then can this statement be reconciled with facts, which we are constrained to confess do sometimes occur within our own observation? Simply in this way. What Solomon lays down as the security of a man's being found in old age in the fear of God, is the circumstance of his having been trained as a child in the way he should go. He says, that when this has been the case, then the good effects thereof are perceptible even in old age: but he does not say a word as to the effect which is produced when a child's instruction has been imperfectly attended to. All that we may understand him to say (as far as it falls in within our present subject) is, that when due attention has been paid in every respect to the cultivation of the moral and spiritual faculties, then the

benefits of such education will last as long as life. But he by no means asserts, that careless, thoughtless, injudicious, uninteresting attempts to instruct the child's mind will be productive of good eventually. "The way in which the child should go" is the only "way" from which "he will not depart." His parents, his friends, may think that they have put him in that way, and all the while be miserably deceived; but in this case, when, after all, matters have turned out very different from what they expected, they are not to impugn the veracity of the divine statement, but to set about discovering whether their own mode of informing the infant and the childish mind has not been really faulty in some respects, so that, in reality, any other way than "the way in which he should go" has been that to which the young Christian has been habituated.

For example, a parent or a sponsor may affirm, that they have taken every pains to let their children be rightly impressed with a high sense of their duties to God and to

man, when they have sent them to a school, where they may become familiar with the pages of Scripture, and know many of its fundamental doctrines, and the formularies of the Church, by rote. And a very delightful thing it is to think, that, generally speaking, the very first efforts made to strengthen the memory are those of a religious nature; the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, the Catechism, the Collects, and such-like formularies of true Christian faith, being generally the first things which children get by rote. And thus, out of the mouths even of babes and sucklings, proceed the praises of God. But if children repeat a form of words taken from Scripture itself, or gathered from different parts of Scripture, and yet are not taught to think about what they are saying; if no questions are asked them, in order to discover whether they have been attending while they have been repeating what they have learnt; if they are allowed to read, without being told the meaning of things which they would not otherwise

comprehend, and without being patiently and kindly catechised upon the pages before them; it is very evident that those children are in the way to derive very little good from their school hours. And yet very generally parents think that all the work is done, provided they have sent them to places where they professedly get Christian instruction. Let them see to it that the work is done. Let them find out whether the germs of right principle are formed within them, whether their tempers are improving, whether they have good reason to hope that their children will grow up to be good men and good Christians. For if they do less than this, conceiving that it is no business of theirs, since they have committed the work of teaching to others, they are applying a most deceitful unction to their souls, and, in reality, not acting the part of kind friends or tender parents. When cases of this kind of neglect occur on their part, it is no kindness to children to let them continue under imperfect religious discipline, but rather

deserves the name of cruelty, because they are clearly not in "the way in which they ought to go," and there is no reason to expect that in them there will be any patient continuance in well-doing through life.

Another reason why manhood and old age are sometimes disfigured by unchristian habits, and where the expectation was that the fruit should be grapes, and behold there were brought forth wild grapes, is the evil example which children meet with at home. It is bad enough, if fathers and mothers take no interest in their children's religious improvement, and neither encourage it, nor superintend it: but when they expose themselves before their families as examples of intemperance, of dishonesty; when they habitually break the sabbath; when they spend their nights in illegal practices, and make a scandalous gain from what they have procured; when oaths and falsehoods are uttered, and quarrelling and noise are the common attendants upon a household; there will speedily be effected the undoing of all the

good which their children had actually imbibed at school ; and then, of course, "the way" in which they should have persevered being forsaken, it is to little purpose that the forms of "training them up" in that way were complied with. To such unhappy children, home is a scene of such riot, and intemperance, and worldliness, such a school of unchristian conduct, that we may look upon it as a signal mercy, when the lessons which they learn elsewhere are, by the grace of God, the means of their becoming wise unto salvation.

Again, there are injudicious modes of bringing the subject of religion to the hearts of the young, when the intention, on the part of the instructors, is of the best kind. They learn, that without religion there can be no happiness, no peace on earth, no rest in heaven. They feel the blessedness of religion themselves, but they do not sufficiently calculate their children's, as yet small, capacities for spiritual instruction ; but proceed sometimes with a haste, which produces

harm instead of good. Our blessed Lord withheld, we know, from his disciples "many things which he had to tell them, because they were not able to bear them." What father, or mother, or friend, would not then desire to proceed with the tenderest caution in teaching their little ones to become wise unto salvation, lest, by some indiscretion of manner, or by some superfluity of matter, they create an early dislike to the subject of religion, which will shew itself too obviously, when the restraints are weakened by which their childish years have been held, and they are able to think and act for themselves? The heart of a child is not formed of such materials as are capable of being worked upon simply by the operation of love. The action of fear must be brought to bear upon it, before its capacity for the pervading grace of the Gospel is perfected. And although "perfect love casteth out fear," and it be true that "the love of God and the love of our neighbour comprehends all the duty of a Christian, yet we must remember, that this

“ perfect love ” is not formed in the heart, until after that fear has done its due work. Those, therefore, who proceed in their domestic circles so exclusively upon the principles of affection and tenderness, as to be irresolute, through excess of anxious feeling, when they should be severe towards the faults of their children; who, because it would hurt them to speak with decision, or to chastise when necessary, are for ever intreating and appealing to the affections and sensibilities of their children; will create in them an imperfect motive of conduct, which will not last when they have to act their part in a different scene of life: that is, the chances are, that it will fail them. With certain peculiar temperaments of mind, it may succeed; but in proof that, in very many cases, the tender anxiety of parents has not been sufficiently mingled with sterner ingredients, we have not unfrequently seen those, who under their fathers’ roofs seemed to have been rightly impressed, and whose conduct was all that was affectionate and

attentive, assuming a very different, a lamentably altered, kind of demeanour, when they have gone forth into the world to act for themselves. Why they have done so, when we should not have thought they would have been so changed, is because the rude unpitying world deals with them differently from what the members of their own beloved household have done, and because, from having been always wooed to obedience, they have not learnt to fear from a sense of duty. And it is fear, my brethren, that must keep us all in check, more or less: even he, in whose heart "perfect love has cast out fear," that is, a servile trembling fear, arising from ignorance or unbelief, is, of all persons, the one who stands in awe most religiously, lest he fall short of what God or his neighbour require of him.

There are other causes in operation, tending to interfere with the hoped for result of Christian education, and which it may be expected will prevent those who are unfortunately under their influence from finding

that peace at the last, which a different mode of instruction would naturally lead to. One particularly must be adverted to, and that is, a deviation from the old ways and the old paths, which in religion, as well as in every thing else wherein the hearts and the heads of men can be engaged, are likely to be forsaken in an age of great general impulse, when novelty and experiment are so greedily sought after. Let us not, for the love of God, and for charity's sake, reject what is new, merely because it is new, (for it may be an improvement on what is old ;) but let us hesitate, and calculate well, before we make experiments upon the souls of any committed to our care, at the expence of the common-sense rules of patience, watchfulness, and perseverance. If we ourselves have found it a work of labour and prayer for years together, perhaps, to overcome even imperfectly one sinful habit, let us be backward in adopting or advocating any untried system or maxims of religious education, that arrogate to themselves a more speedy

and more effectual mode of overcoming the evil propensities of human nature.

Let the impediments, therefore, to true Christian education be speedily considered, and as far as possible be removed out of the way, by all those who are interested, as we all ought to be, in the blessed work of training up children in the way they should go. Let us neither join in the cry against those who are conscientiously doing all that is most scriptural and most prudent towards so high and blessed an end; nor rest satisfied with the professions of pastors and masters, to the exclusion of our own personal investigation into the real attainments made by the young in the things that are pure, and peaceable, and lovely, and of good report. Of one thing we are quite sure, that pains assiduously taken, in love for the souls of those committed to our care, with due regard to the difficulties with which we have to cope at present, and with those which in all probability may assail us by and by, not forgetting unwearied prayer and patience

and hope that our labour may not be in vain in the Lord; such continuance in well-doing, we are quite sure, is the only way to which we can safely trust, as leading to the happy results of which the text speaks. May it be our happiness, my brethren, in this our day of trial and probation, so to remember the lessons of our childhood, as that in the decline of life, and the decay of all our present faculties, we may find our true comfort and rest in the blessed faith and hope of the Gospel! And to those over whom we may exert our influence for moral and spiritual benefit, let us study to impart such sound precepts of true morality and Christian holiness, through faith in our blessed Lord Jesus Christ, that, through the grace of God, we may be allowed to be his instruments towards the salvation of their souls and bodies in the world to come.

SERMON XII.

ECCLESIASTES v. 1, 2.

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools : for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God ; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth : therefore let thy words be few.

THERE is something very remarkable in these words of Solomon, after he had finished building the most magnificent temple that the world had ever seen before, or has seen since. “ Will God indeed dwell on the earth ? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee ; how much less this house that I have builded ! ” as if, notwithstanding all the great pomp and splendour with which he was surrounded, notwith-

standing all the visible manifestations of Jehovah upon earth, determining the exact place where he was pleased to have respect unto the prayers of his servants, there were impressions upon his mind that God might be served acceptably under no such circumstances of worldly magnificence. Whether, indeed, he had any glimpses of that state of things which has come to pass under the Gospel, we cannot tell; but we, my brethren, are living in days, when the reality of the events, which he, perhaps, might have been permitted to see dimly and imperfectly, has actually come to pass. The glory of the first and of the second temple has passed away. The hour is come, when neither in Jerusalem nor in the mountains of Samaria is God exclusively to be worshipped; but a more glorious dispensation is established, according to which we know, "that God is no respecter of persons; but that in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him;" he being a Spirit, and being every where pre-

sent to those that serve him in spirit and in truth. As in the days of Solomon, and before, and after till the captivity, there was one nation, and one city, and one temple peculiarly holy, and which God had chosen to himself; and as after the return from captivity till the days of our Saviour's coming upon earth the Jewish nation was still the only depository of the revealed will of God; now the Spirit of God dwells with the Church universal scattered throughout the world, but united together in the one communion of saints, abiding with the whole and with every member of that blessed society. "Lo!" said our Lord to his disciples, "I am with you, even to the end of the world." "The Spirit of truth . . . dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." "Know ye not," saith St. Paul, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." And again, "Know ye not that your body is the

temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

But although the spirituality of worship, which is now enjoined by the Gospel, makes every true Christian's soul and body a temple of the Lord, inasmuch as the Spirit dwells within him, purifying his heart, and enabling him to mortify his members which are upon earth; although he has a church in his own family, when, in the faith and love of Christians, they meet together for prayer and praise to God, and when they retire each to their own chambers to commune in private; although "wherever it may be that two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, there is he in the midst of them," and thus, in another sense, that congregation of faithful men may in some sort be styled a church; yet there are considerations connected with the house of God, in which we are now assembled, which invest this

consecrated building with peculiarly interesting matter to all thoughtful Christians, and make it eminently applicable to those who worship God within these walls.

The different subjects for meditation, which the passage of Scripture before us suggests, will be considered in their regular order: let us first enquire, what it is that constitutes our churches the houses of God, and why they may be peculiarly styled holy. We do not mean, then, when we give them sacred and reverential titles, that the Lord, whom the heaven of heavens is not able to hold or comprise, dwells in buildings erected by the skill and labour of man, (let them have been ever so artificially or expensively constructed,) as wholly and only to be contained there within, and no where else; for in this sense the presence of God never dwelt even in Solomon's temple: but they are God's, inasmuch as, by a solemn act of consecration and dedication to him, they

See Homily for repairing and keeping clean and comely adorning of Churches.

have been delivered over for the sole property and service of the “ great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls ^b.” By authentic devotional services, they have been separated from every other purpose except that of religion ; and, by proper prayers for the occasion, surrendered up at once and for ever to God, ourselves divested of all personal right in them, and he alone put into full possession, to the annihilation of all our own private claims and pretensions. It has been said, and that too by one of our established formularies ^c, that it is because God’s people resort unto the temple or the house of God, and exercise themselves therein in holy and heavenly things, therefore it is counted and called holy : but there appears to be some inaccuracy in this reason ; for “ it is not the matter transacted in it, but the right and title to it, that makes any place public or private ^d.” If, for example,

^b Stanhope, vol. iii. p. 355, 6.

^c Homily, ut sup. paul. inf.

^d Stanhope, ut sup.

a public body of men were to meet and dispatch the affairs relating to their society in a private room, that does not make that place to become their common hall of council: the difference still remains in point of title; the place wherein the meeting is held is the property of one person, though used, it may be, on an occasion for a public purpose. Their meeting for a public purpose does not make the place public, nor does it become public till all private title to it is surrendered, and the whole given up for the use of the society in question. Thus it is that our churches are peculiarly God's possession, because men have given up all personal claim and right to them, and made them over by special acts of dedication to God; and this having been done, to alienate them, or to take them back again from God, is nothing less than robbery and sacrilege. Although therefore "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," and there is nothing that we have or are but is solely his; yet, inasmuch as every thing that we possess

has not been consecrated to God by such solemn service of prayer and dedication as our churches have, it seems that we are justified in styling them preeminently his, in consequence of the peculiar manner in which they have been separated for his service. I only ask, my brethren, that this argument may have its due weight with you, and that no unreasonable inferences be deduced from it; which, indeed, I have no reason to expect, after what has been said in an earlier part of this discourse.

Thus, then, the place wherein we are now assembled being "the house of God" by solemn dedication, and entire alienation from all other purposes than those of Christian worship; and, as it follows by consequence, every thing in it and around it belonging to God, by a sacred form of investing him therewith, (if I may so say;) the precept of the wise king of Israel, which first falls under our observation, becomes particularly worthy of our attention; "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of

God." The expression is uncommon ; let us examine it, therefore, and endeavour clearly to understand its meaning.

In common then with many sentences, wherein mention is made of a course of life, by the introduction of words in rather a different sense than what they naturally bear, this passage of Scripture may be interpreted in some such way as this. Keep a narrow and constant watch over yourselves when you attend on the public service of God. Remember in whose presence you stand ; what is the duty which you are assembled to perform ; how great your need of his mercy ; how little you deserve it ; what reason you have to expect that he may no longer vouchsafe it to you ; how many times you have abused it. Consider thoughtfully what great blessings are promised to the sincere prayers of those who assemble together in public ; let your hearts expand in brotherly affection towards all around you, and be thoughtful for their temporal and spiritual necessities, not less than for those

of your own. Interpreted in this kind of way, we see enjoined in the precept, regularity of attendance at the house of God, both as to the constancy of the habit, and with respect to persons being at church in proper time. It enjoins the strictest decorum during the celebration of divine service, as that which alone becomes guilty fallen creatures, laden with transgressions, which should cover them with shame and contrition, and utterly repress every thing like levity or inattention. It declares the house of God to be no place for display; none for vanity; none for idle meeting with friends; nor for unprofitable talk; nor for vacancy of thought; nor for sleep as unprofitable. It is calculated to check the spirit of criticism, which is sometimes apt to be more active than the disposition, to listen and learn with meekness and simplicity of heart. Its tendency is, to make us return to our homes more and more thoughtful about our own soul, as week follows upon week, and days and months are bringing us nearer and

nearer to our graves ; and to hail with thankfulness every opportunity that offers itself, of pouring out our hearts before God in the congregation, in such expressive and simple language as the Liturgy contains, or in the voice of psalms and thanksgivings.

Such is the general import of the passage, “ Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God :” and if the particular branches of duty which it involves were dwelt upon at length, we should find that it comprises within it every subject on which the heart of man can be interested, as connected with the public worship of Almighty God, as he has revealed himself to us in the Gospel. In what follows, then, there may be much that addresses itself generally to the consciences of my hearers, although my object is chiefly to continue those observations which I have been lately making with regard to the Christian education of children. A good habit formed early in them, is likely to be lasting. If, indeed, it be retained only in childhood, still that is something ; while

we are morally sure, that unless early impressions are fixed in persons concerning the sanctity of the place which has been consecrated to God, the difficulty of doing so in after-life will be considerably increased, perhaps in some cases insurmountable.

If we would "train them up" then "in the way they should go," in order that "when they are old they may not depart from it," let them, as soon as possible, be taught, that God will not hold him guiltless, that profanes the place which is set apart for divine purposes. In the absence of their own feelings of devotion, or of propriety, or of decency, it rests, of course, with the elder part of the community to see that their children have as few opportunities as possible of offending God in his holy place, and ordinances. The possibility of their so doing should be prevented, if we would wish to avoid the constant recurrence of those things which are offensive to the congregation, and to all well-wishers to the order and quietness which should pervade an assembly of Chris-

tians. And if it is, perhaps, too much to expect, that of themselves, let them be ever so well taught, they will at all times behave in church as they ought, we should, in our zeal for the glory of God and the honour of his name, see to it, that other checks are put upon them besides those of their own consciences. Every allowance, of course, is to be made for the thoughtlessness and giddiness of their age; but, at the same time, every thing should be avoided in their education that may have a tendency to connect in their minds the ideas of restraint and discipline with the service of their Lord and Saviour, "whose service is perfect freedom." For if under the notion that, because they are learning the rudiments of religion, we imagine, that the common feelings with regard to school are not likely to be entertained by them in church equally as well as in any other place, we know very little of human nature. What is the consequence of the custom in some places, where it has prevailed, of making the house of God the place

of Sunday instruction, but that the opportunity is frequently taken by many of the least tractable part of the children, as soon as the eye of the minister, or of their friends or parents, is removed from them, (as sometimes is unavoidably the case before the commencement of divine service,) to absent themselves entirely from church? because, forsooth, to them it is inseparably united with the thoughts of school discipline. Surely, we must give human nature no encouragements to do what is hateful to God and ruinous to the soul, when, with every thing conspiring to assist us in overcoming it, and to instil into the heart, by the grace of God, the principles of the Gospel, the task has been found full of difficulty.

It will materially help them towards a right observance of the Wise-man's advice, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God," if their attention is early directed towards those passages of the Prayer-book, which exhort them to accompany the minister with a pure heart and

humble voice, in the general Confession and Responses throughout the service. When, on the one part, the prayer is made, "O Lord, open thou our lips," and the congregation proceeds, "And our mouth shall shew forth thy praise," let them see the inconsistency of such profession with the melancholy and oppressive silence that sometimes pervades our solemn meetings, when every voice ought, on the contrary, to be lifted up in prayer, or confession, or thanksgiving. Not that the silence which very frequently prevails, when we should rather expect to hear responses, is any proof that the thoughts of Christians are not engaged in the service of their God and Saviour; nor, on the other hand, that the blended voices of the whole congregation are a decided proof that all comes from the heart; but, "if it be a singular privilege, that the lay-members of the Church of England have a greater share allotted to them in her offices than those of any other persuasion" we hear of, and yet,

^e Stanhope, vol. iii. p. 361.

in other reformed churches, there is more anxiety expressed by the people to join in their services, and, when they neglect to do so, the omission is considered to be something unusual and scandalous ; surely the same rule ought even more forcibly to apply to those among ourselves, who are guilty of the like omission.

By beginning with the young, in our endeavour to remove this defect in public worship, we are beginning with every prospect of success. Far be it from me to think, that what has now been said, with reference to children, should be unproductive of good in those who have grown old in this defective practice : to whomsoever it applies, to him it has been spoken, in sincere wish that he may unite more cordially in the public service of his Lord and Master, in an earnest regard for his soul's health. Any exhortation, indeed, any considerations, which may be instrumental in awakening our consciences more and more to the great things which are required of us all, as members of Christ

and of one another, will be thankfully received by every Christian that is studious of growing in grace, and in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour. And if we can any of us recollect, in the sorrow of our hearts, that months and years have rolled over our heads, and have left us very much in the same state of mind, Sunday after Sunday, still too unmindful of God's presence, still too careless about our souls, still hesitating to repent and lead a new life, still backward in renouncing ourselves, and applying to the all-sufficient merits of our blessed Saviour; may we henceforth, in obedience to the precept of the text, find more spiritual edification in church, and carry it with us to our homes and our society. Let us make our improvement here depend upon ourselves, by God's grace assisting us; for which grace let us pray in public and in private, "without ceasing," in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord.



SERMON XIII.

ECCLESIASTES v. 1.

Be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

As in the words which precede this text, I took occasion to observe, some time since, there was contained much of general importance to those who worship God in this house, so, upon the present occasion, we have a precept of general utility to all Christians. Undoubtedly, the earlier the habit of paying attention to every part of divine service is formed, the more likely is the worshipper to derive increasing good from his visits to this place as he advances in life; and, therefore, it is our duty, as far as we can, to make children feel that they are themselves

interested in all that is going on around them; to make them feel, that it is for the good of their souls that we wish them to attend divine service; that the prayers are for their good, the sermon intended for them; in short, that they have as great a concern in the public solemnities of this house as any other part of the congregation. And happy are those children, the tenderness of whose parents, or the kindness of whose friends, has led them to think seriously, and to stand in awe of offending God; who do not require the watchful eye of a superior to restrain them from improper conduct when in the house of God, but whose own sense of propriety acts as a check upon them. From such we may expect worthy fruits in after life; from such beginnings of wisdom, we may hope to see the most blessed results in youth, in manhood, and in old age.

But as the advice of the Wise-man was not given to children any more than to older persons, even to high and low, rich and poor; let us draw near and listen to it, who-

ever we may be; and may God give us grace to lay to heart this passage of Scripture, so that our visits to this house of prayer may be profitable to our souls, and be the means of promoting our salvation, through Jesus Christ.

From our Lord's own words we learn, that the habit of applying our minds to the important truths of religion is a very difficult one to form. Experience convinces us, that persons, though generally well practised in the duty of listening, fail at times in keeping up their attention; that at times they do not apply to themselves what they hear; and that at times they forget it. So needful at every period of Christian progress are prayers, that God will not take his Holy Spirit away, but continue it to the increase of faith and piety. So full of warning are those precepts, "take heed how ye hear," "he that hath ears to hear let him hear;" as if to remind us, that it is by the exercise of our thoughts upon what we hear, by considering that the speaker addresses himself to every individual person,

that his advice will be attended with good.

When then we are instructed to "be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools," we must consider that the precept enjoins upon us the exercise of all our spiritual faculties, in order that we may profit from what we hear. So familiar are we in general with the mode of conducting the public worship of God within these sacred walls, that we are apt to hear the prayers which are offered up by the minister, the lessons which he reads out of the Old and New Testament, and the sermons which he preaches, as a matter of course, a regular point of duty on the Lord's day. With many of us, no doubt, the devotional parts of the Prayer-book, many of the Psalms, and much of the rest of Scripture, can be repeated from memory, and most of the subjects on which the minister preaches have been heard by us over and over again. There is, in short, a great sameness in our public mode of conducting divine service; and, as

human nature is fond of novelty and excitement, it frequently happens, that neither the public prayers, nor the reading of Scriptures, nor the exposition of Scripture, have the desired effect upon the hearers. And yet the prayers of our Church are full of the deepest piety and humility. They describe, in the most contrite and tender language, the condition of our hearts; they express our entire need of God's mercy and forgiveness, through Jesus Christ; they omit nothing that we could desire to ask for; they direct where to get comfort when we are distressed, where to repose when we are weary, where to obtain wisdom when we feel ourselves ignorant; how to love God and our neighbours; how to take up our daily cross, and to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. Let any one thoughtfully look over the Collects, and ask himself, whether, supposing that he offered them up in Christian sincerity of heart, as occasions required, there would be any Christian grace which he had not besought God to confer upon him, any virtue which

he had omitted to pray for, any degree of spiritual understanding, which had not formed a part of his petition. Let him listen again to the holy Scriptures, which are read to him week after week, and reflect, whether the selections that have been made from the whole Bible are not eminently "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness." And, as to the sermons which he hears preached, let him candidly lay aside every feeling of prejudice, all inclination to criticise, all tendency to superciliousness and contempt, and determine to derive good from the words of him, who speaks as the ambassador of Christ; who delivers his message, because he has been specially appointed and ordained to the ministry; and such an one will never depart from Christ without being edified.

It is evident, that, under such a state of things as this, if hearing has not been productive of good, it must be because persons have not brought their hearts into unison with the devout prayers of the Church, or

are too impetuous for the sober appeals which meet them in this place. If, with the constant use of a service, whose tendency, in every respect, is to convince men of sin, and, leading them to forsake it, to make them perfect in every good work, their hearts and lives are not better for the worship they have paid, the fault is clearly not in the established forms which they have been using, nor necessarily at all the fault of any part of our devotional system. No imperfections of the minister certainly ought to be allowed to counteract the beneficial tendency of the prayers of the Church at least, for these inculcate the attainment of every Christian grace that can purify the soul, and make it perfect; so that if these alone be attended to in a right spirit, there is reason to hope, that "every good and perfect gift" will be vouchsafed from above to the devout worshipper, who worships God in spirit and in truth.

We do not, however, see those good fruits so abundant as we should expect, from

the establishment of such excellent means of grace as we have among us. Let us enquire, then, a little into the reasons that tend to interfere with the proper effect which they ought to have. It is clear, that inattention of one kind or another, that hearing carelessly from one cause or another, are most active in preventing the word of God, and the influences of his Spirit, from working a thorough reformation in men's hearts and lives; in other words, that "the sacrifice of fools" is far oftener given within these walls than some of the congregation appear to suppose. I say, in other words; for the only alternative that the text leaves us is to conclude, that when persons are not ready to hear with all consideration, and determination to improve, they must "give the sacrifice of fools." In whatever degree they are inattentive, in that same degree do they give evidence that they are offering the sacrifice of fools. The conclusion of the matter is, that any degree of wilful inattention in the house of God, (to say nothing of wilful in-

attention any where else, when subjects of moral or spiritual importance are treated of, or alluded to,) that any degree, I say, of wilful inattention to subjects which are calculated to do our souls and understandings good, is a wilful sin; that not to serve God with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the strength, is to serve the devil, the world, or the flesh; that any intentional wanderings of thought from the main point on which the soul should be fixed, while we are engaged in the public worship of God, bears witness to our want of some Christian grace; that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." For, if we consult the Scripture, we shall find, that the terms wisdom and folly are in most frequent use to express, the one, the worship of God and obedience to his commandments; and the other, adherence to sin and the works of the flesh. They are said to be wise, who believe in God, who fear him, who love him with all their spiritual energies, and who serve him faithfully all the days of their lives; and they are said to

be foolish, who do him no such service, but, on the contrary, whose hearts are turned away from him to serve the devil, the world, and the flesh. They are wise, who are spiritually so, and who prove their character by their "seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness:" they are foolish, who, in any degree, let the world, with its affections and lusts, interfere with the pursuit and practice of true religion. Then, in the 90th Psalm, we pray for a deep practical sense of the vanity of life, and the certainty of something after death, in these words; "Teach us so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." So in Job we read, "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding^a." So, again, Christ is named "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." He "of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness." To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; "If any one lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth

^a Job xxviii. 28.

to all men liberally, and upbraideth not." "The Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation." So, with regard to that which is directly opposed to this wisdom, we see it spoken of synonymously with irreligion and immorality. This was just the character of the man, who, in one of our Lord's parables, is thus addressed; "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." So those, who would not see the meaning of the Scriptures that related to our Saviour's resurrection, were addressed by him as "fools, and slow of heart to believe." So St. Paul speaks to the inconsiderate reasoner against the almighty power of God in the resurrection of the body; "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." Again, he exhorts us to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, redeeming the time:" to the "preaching of the cross to them that perish is foolishness:" to the natural man "the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness," because they can only be discerned spiritually.

Moreover, as the sacrifice of righteousness means the manifestation of a conduct entirely under the influence of true religion, (which is heavenly wisdom,) the sacrifice of fools is any thing done irreligiously, unbecoming the seriousness of Christians. That sacrifice is offered when a little thing is done in violation of the true principles of Christian decorum, quite as much as when an open breach of Christian law is made. Of course, I do not say that all faults are alike: but any considerate person must clearly see, that the thoughtless, careless manner in which some persons behave in this place, necessarily involves them in the guilt of offending God.

We have seen, that inattention, strictly such, is one cause of unprofitableness, under the means of grace, which are appointed for public edification. There are other causes also, quite as mischievous and as ruinous to the soul. And there are characters written for our learning in Scripture, to warn us lest we become fruitless hearers also, when the

word of God, and the lessons of truth, are delivered to us. Was it not said of Herod, that he "heard" John "gladly?" Yet all the while he repented not of his adultery and profligacy, nor hesitated to take the most vindictive measures against the holy man that had told him the truth. So there may be hearers in the present day, who "receive the word with joy," who love to hear religion spoken of, who delight to hear sermons and read devotional books, but who, there is every reason to fear, continue, notwithstanding, in the unrestrained indulgence of those passions, which every word they hear, and every line they read, condemn. It is with many of the present day, (and it has been the fault of all ages,) to substitute punctuality at the house of prayer, and regularity in every thing connected with the externals of religion, for real penitence and contrition of heart, for active self-denial and charity. The mistake is made, it is true, not intentionally very

* Mark vi. 20.

often; but whenever it is done, it shews how very deceitful the heart is, that leads a man to imagine he is making progress as a Christian, when he is only busied about the circumstantialia of his faith. Of true religion, the public worship of God is of course an essential part; but when such service is not attended by worthy fruits, it has evidently not been connected with vital Christianity on the part of the worshipper.

Again, was it not to those who "had not the love of God in them," "who received not him that came in his Father's name," "who sought not the honour which cometh from God only," that our Lord said, concerning John the Baptist, "he was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light?" Was it not the multitude which held John as a prophet, that cried out against the Lord of life and glory, Let him be crucified? Did not Felix listen and tremble, when St. Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance,

^c John v. 42, 43, 44, 35.

and judgment to come, and yet remain in his impenitence? Was there not something that prevented king Agrippa from becoming entirely a Christian, when his conscience quailed beneath the words of fire, in which the Spirit gave utterance, by the mouth of the great apostle? And in these, or any other such like characters that we can remember, do we not see, that while they continued to repent not of their sensuality, their profligacy, their intemperance, their oppression, their thoughtlessness, they all offered the sacrifice of fools? And must we not fear for ourselves, my brethren, lest we fall into some sort of condemnation like them, if the Holy Spirit, which intreats us every day and every hour to yield up ourselves unto God, is listened to with any thing less than entire affection?

Let it never be removed from our consciences, that, if we feel we are guilty in having paid less attention than we ought to what has concerned our souls, we have been guilty of a sin which God will not count light. The not "considering that we

have done evil," when we have returned from the house of God without any more thorough determination than we had when we entered it of forsaking sin, is the cause that the practice has so widely prevailed. If men were only to think, (which, indeed, is the only right way in which they ought to think on the matter,) that every time they depart from the public worship of God, they must be so much the worse for what they have been doing, if they are not so much the better; it is impossible that they could be guilty of such proceedings, as sometimes make the church like the temple, out of which our Lord drove the buyers and sellers, and which he upbraids them for having so profaned from its sacred purposes as a house of prayer. "They consider not that they do evil." They consider not, because custom, and habit, and fashion, have made their thoughts dull and heavy. They consider not, because all their lives long, it may be, they have been in like manner inconsiderate. They consider not, (for their thoughts are otherwise engaged,) that every word of spi-

ritual warning and advice that has not had its due effect upon their souls and consciences, that whatever they have done themselves which has proved them inattentive, or whatever they have done which has drawn off the attention of others, who but for them would have remained devout ; (whether it be by a vain display of dress, or by an unseasonable time of coming to church, when all the rest of the congregation is assembled, and divine service has been going on for some time, or by any undevotional behaviour whatever ;) they " consider not that they do evil."

"O that they were wise, that they understood these things, that they would consider their latter end!" May the Holy Spirit quicken our hearts more and more in all spiritual wisdom, and in all the fruits thereof, that, having ears to hear, and hearts to understand, we may receive the word, and bring forth fruit unto holiness, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

SERMON XIV.

EPH. v. 19.

*Singing and making melody in your heart to
the Lord.*

THE passage of Scripture, of which this is a part, is remarkable, from the circumstance of its annexing so highly spiritual a precept to the prohibition of a vice so low and sensual as the one which is condemned. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess," is the evil thing which St. Paul charges the Ephesians to avoid, as they valued their Christian name and privileges, and as they hoped to be saved; "but," he proceeds, "be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for

all things unto God and the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." The Apostle, that is, prays them to forsake one of the lowest and most brutalizing vices of which human nature can be guilty, and give themselves up to habits of the most fervent and exalted piety; to go, it seems, from the extreme of immoral conduct, to the farthest point on the other side, namely, to the practice of the most spiritual acts of devotion: for as surely characteristic of a carnal and sensual mind as is the habit of intemperance, so surely characteristic of a highly devotional and spiritual heart is the singing of psalms and hymns. Now as it is not usual, either in divine or human precepts, for men to be taught to go so rapidly from what is wrong to what is right, but to be gradually led on, step by step, from sinful practices to good ones; as it is generally, if not universally, the best mode of teaching them "to abhor the evil and to cleave to the good;" to lead them to religion by no

sudden transition from sinful courses; there must be some particular reason for the Ephesians being appealed to by the Apostle in a manner so different from what we should have expected. For, from seeing what is usually the best mode of instruction, and from a knowledge of human nature, we might have presumed to think, that the old way of "line upon line and precept upon precept," with all due consideration of the weakness and wilfulness of the heart, would have a better effect than any other.

But the Scripture, my brethren, whatever we might have conceived upon any particular parts of it, always speaks the truth, which is but for us to know and to follow; and in the passage now before us we shall discover, upon close examination, that there is a more immediate connection between the vice forbidden and the devotional practice enjoined, than we might have suspected. It is a physical fact, that the drunkard, when he is under the effects of his intemperance, is sometimes found to speak and behave

himself in an excited and impassioned way, quite unlike his usual manner, when he is under no such stimulus ; and this is notorious in the instances which have been frequently met with among men, both in humble and in exalted stations of life. And there have been persons, who have so fatally given way to habits of indulgence, as to be incompetent to the undertaking of any thing, even of trifling importance, without having first had recourse to some intoxicating or stimulating expedient. So soon do men depart from habits of simplicity and temperance, and so difficult is it, when all the comforts and luxuries of a high state of civilization are put within their reach, to use them with sufficient reference to the duties of self-denial and mortification.

The Ephesians in particular, to whom St. Paul was writing, and who were naturally much addicted to intemperance, had proceeded so far, as even to have established among them certain dissolute and revolting ceremonies, at which intoxication made an

essential part. They were heathens; they knew not the true God, they knew not the Saviour, they knew not the Sanctifier, till St. Paul had preached him to them: but, till this time, they had been sunk in the darkest ignorance of the truth, and the deepest idolatry. The nineteenth chapter of the Acts informs us, how "their foolish heart had become darkened, and how they had "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image like unto corruptible man;" how they had "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator;" and how, in consequence, God had given "them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts." With them, indeed, we gather from other sources than the Scripture, it was a point of religion to intoxicate themselves, and to run about their streets and fields and vineyards in an extravagant and tumultuous manner, shouting, in wild and delirious language, the praises of their false deities; and by every violent and enthusiastic gesture,

and excited style of language, to shew their mistaken zeal in their abominable idolatries.)

Now, after all this, you will observe, that the prohibition and the exhortation, which St. Paul uses towards them, precede and follow each other in the most natural and beautiful manner. He writes or speaks, as it were, in this way. Instead of inflaming yourselves with wine, and, under the violent excitement thereby produced, crying aloud and singing in the praise of your idols and your false gods, let a holier and a more calm and tranquil spirit take possession of you, and let your hearts and your tongues unite in praising him whom I preach to you, and who alone is worthy of all glory and honour, all praise and worship. Let your zeal and enthusiasm be directed to a different object from that to which they have been devoted hitherto, and worship ye the Lord, in spirit and in truth, with all the devotion of your hearts, with all the praises of your lips and voice, in such a manner as alone is acceptable to him.

In the singing of psalms and hymns, then, (to make no more particular allusions to the case of those whom St. Paul was addressing,) one thing is especially to be observed; namely, the necessity of the heart's being deeply engaged in the service which is paid. It is "singing to the Lord," the "making melody in our hearts unto him," that is enjoined upon us as a Christian duty. It is the pouring forth the pious feelings of our hearts in acts of gratitude, of praise, and thanksgiving, and supplication, that we are to think about, when we would raise our voices in devotional song. It is no psalm that God delights in, when our hearts are not engaged in it; as it is no prayer, no act of devotion of any kind acceptable to him, if it is done without thought, without feeling, and out of form's sake alone.

And it is from knowing this, and also from knowing how prone human nature is to rest satisfied in mere forms, without attending to the spirit in which they should be observed, that there is the greatest need

of warning men how they presume to draw near to God with their lips, while their heart is far from him.

In no part of public devotion is there more reason to fear, that there is often paid a mere formal service, than in the singing of psalms and hymns. God Almighty gave us our tongues and our voices, to be employed in blessing and praising his holy Name; and it is a natural and a spiritual thing, when our hearts are filled with thoughts beyond those of common occurrence, to express ourselves in an extraordinary manner. This is the ground upon which the practice of singing psalms in the congregation is founded. The hearts of the worshippers are full, or ought to be full, of meditations on the goodness, the greatness, the love, the mercy of God; and how else can they shew it than by words and tones, the best and most musical that they have? Why, when they are impressed with a sense of all that God has done, and is doing for them, should any be silent? why should that service be generally

left to a certain few to perform, when the devotional feelings, which should be shewn in singing and in music, ought to be pervading the congregation? Custom has here been the parent of much evil; for while it would be very uncharitable, and perhaps very far from the truth, to suppose, that those who do not sing have no devotion at heart; yet, does not the too general practice of leaving that part of the service to a set number of persons, seem as if those who did not join in it, considered themselves rather as uninterested in what was going on? Why do persons assemble together in the house of God, except it is with one heart and voice to pray to God and to praise him? And what is the preacher's office, but to lead them, by God's grace, to more fervent expressions of their love to him, and of their charity to mankind? How surprised would any one be, coming for the first time into one of our churches, having been told that they were consecrated edifices in which Christians met together for the purpose of

praising God, and singing psalms and hymns, to see and to hear the too frequent manner in which this high and blessed service is performed ! Why, he would ask, are these sitting apart from the rest of the congregation, and the only persons who seem impressed with a sense of their duty : and why are the others sometimes either inattentive, or guilty of indecorum, worse than inattention ? The answer would not be made to such an one, We have nothing to do with the singing ; for this confession every one that frequents the house of prayer would be ashamed to make, because he ought to know, that singing is as much a devotional act as praying, or listening to that which may help towards the knowledge and practice of duty. And if this answer were not made, none else could give the enquirer any satisfaction. If the reply were made, as in justice it can very often, We are not able to sing, we cannot comprehend the tune, we have no talent for music ; then it would be rejoined, Although you cannot raise your

voices in harmony with the psalm or hymn, yet you have your common prayer books, and you can see the passages of Scripture which are sung, and you can feel them, and make "melody in your hearts," if you fear to attempt to raise your voices. We should be very much struck, I think, with language of this kind coming from one, who was not accustomed to see how Christians conducted themselves sometimes in the house of God ; whereas now, because from our earliest infancy the style and the mode of performing church music has not been sufficiently congregational, the congregation in too many instances think that they have no concern in it. It is in your own power, my brethren, and it is in the power of every congregation of Christians, to render their solemn meeting for public service one indeed of prayer and of praise ; one in which every heart, if not every voice, may join, and which, being united in without fear or diffidence, would make the service of men upon earth like the glorious employment of angels in heaven.

But as there may be sometimes no ability in a Christian to swell the tide of praise and thanksgiving with his own voice, although God, who readeth the heart, may see there the true feelings of faith, or repentance, and devotedness to his will ; so, on the other hand, there may be psalmody sometimes without any devotional feeling whatever in the hearts of those who make it. In fact, the united instrumental and vocal powers of any exclusive part of the congregation, making ever so sweet music, is no decided proof at all that the hearts of those who make it are always spiritually disposed. And the reason of this is, that persons may be only indulging a natural taste for music and singing, when they think they are doing a religious service, and one necessarily acceptable to God. They mistake natural feeling for religious impression ; they feel an elevation of spirits, a tranquillity, or a degree of fervour and animation, it may be, according to the strain of music that engages them ; and so deceitful is the human heart, that it

sometimes will induce a person to believe that to be the effect of the grace of God, which is occasioned merely by the power of music upon the natural spirits. And so in those that listen to the music and singing in the church: it may be, the impression which they feel is as much the effect of a natural fondness for melody, or an acquired and practised skill in its beauties, as of deep religious feeling: for music, where it meets with its votaries, is seasonable at all times; in every age, in every place, when we are gay or grave, in youth, in age, in sorrow and in joy, in sickness and in health, it has power to chase away the evil spirit, and raise, and cheer, and strengthen, and harmonize the mind. This is a blessing for which we should indeed be thankful; but let us remember, that in the public service of God, if music does not quicken our spiritual and devotional powers, we are not the better, in a Christian point of view, for all the calmness and quietness it may have produced physically, or for all the elevation

and fervency of spirit which it may have created^d.

It is much to be regretted, that, upon this subject, which tends so materially to the devout celebration of public worship, and to the edification of Christians, when it is conducted in a reverential manner, there should be such a great indifference as it met with throughout the country. And it cannot be improper to speak of this indifference from the pulpit, inasmuch as this is the place from which should proceed every thing that may tend, by God's grace, to the promotion of true religion, and the devout worshipping of God, in public as well as in private. And if upon certain occasions, that seem to call for it, the minister's discourse be less strictly formed after the models of addresses to his congregation than is usual, the variety and the novelty may have upon some persons a good effect, in inducing them to remember it better than they otherwise might. Cer-

^d Read Hooker's *Eccl. Pol.* v. 38. and Horne's *Sermon on Church Music*.

tainly it will be a blessed thing to us all, my brethren, whether it may be by any thing that I may be enabled to say, or by any train of reflections on your part, we may render this house, which is called by the name of the Lord, a house of more fervent prayer, and more single-hearted praise, than it has sometimes been. Much may be done by every individual; and even if, after all, the sincere and humble endeavours on the part of any do not appear to be so successful as might have been expected, yet let them rest assured, that they shall in no wise lose their reward. When the stated occasions arise, then let us endeavour, as we are invited, to sing unto the Lord, and to make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation; to come before his presence with thanksgiving, and to make a joyful noise unto him with psalms, and to give him the glory due unto his name. Not that all our prayers, nor all our praise and thanksgiving, can add to his glory essentially, for he is not made more glorious by the highest powers of hu-

man adoration ; but still it is the best service that we can pay, the best proof that we can give of our worshipping, serving, and obeying him as we ought to do, as the subjects of his natural and his spiritual kingdom.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, be given all honour, and thanksgiving, and praise, and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE END.





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